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ABSTRACT

This survey evaluated residential schools held by Riverina College in connection with subjects and courses taught to external students in the second semester of 1980. Questionnaires were sent to 509 students who attended a total of 785 residential schools, and a response rate of 57.4% was obtained. Data were collected on: (1) type of course of respondents; (2) specific course of respondents; (3) subjects studied; (4) gender; (5) ages of respondents; (6) home state; (7) home town; (8) distance from nearest library; (9) adequacy of college library; (10) previous experience with distance study; (11) reasons for enrolling; (12) sufficiency of details about residential schools provided before arrival; (13) preferred month for classes; (14) importance of certain residential school features; (15) the need for the residential school; (16) satisfaction with content; (17) impressions of administrative arrangements; (18) comments on administrative information and communication, registration, and collection of room keys, staff, practical work facilities, and residential school administration; (19) administrators' helpfulness; (20) impressions of academic activities; (21) comments on academic matters, including general comments on residential schools, staff, teaching methods, and courses; (22) impressions of lecturers' help; and (23) attitude changes. (8 references) (MES)

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RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS
HELD BY RIVERINA COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 1980

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Note: The numbers after the point in the following section refer to the appropriate section in the full text, and correspond with the item numbers in the questionnaire.

00. SUMMARY

- 00.0 Not all subjects offered externally by Riverina College have residential schools, but where provided attendance is compulsory. This is the first attempt to obtain a wide picture across subjects of students' impressions concerning the academic activities and administrative arrangements involved. The number of usable returns received was 465 (or 59% of attendances). They came from 287 different students, indicating that many students attended more than one residential school.
- 00.1 Most (78%) of the returns came from people enrolled in UG1 bachelors' degrees, and UG3 associate diplomas (undergraduate) accounted for another 15% of the returns.
- 00.2 Returns were received from students enrolled in eighteen different courses. However, most (29%) were in Applied Biology, 23% in Wine Science, and 22% in the two Life Management streams.
- 00.3 Replies were received from students attending 44 different subject residential schools. Of these 11% attended the Chemistry 1B school and 8% attended Biology 1A. The returns were science-oriented, and many geared towards practical laboratory work.
- 00.4 Almost 61% of the returns were sent in by male students, but it is not known how typical this proportion is of the College's population.
- 00.5 Half of the returns came from students in their 20's and a further 31% from those in their 30's.
- 00.6 Over two-thirds of the returns came from New South Wales, and a further 16% from Victoria.
- 00.7 Over one-third of the returns came from State capitals, but a further 21% from places with under 5,000 people or isolated properties.
- 00.8 Over one-third of the returns came from students living within 5km of a useful library, but 16% from students more than 100km away from a suitable resource.
- 00.9 Only 16% of the returns came from students who thought that the College library's services were 'poor' during their residential schools. A quarter thought that they were 'good', and 46% 'adequate'.

- 00.10 Some 83% of the returns came from students who had had no previous experience as an external student before enrolling in their present courses.
- 00.11 Half of the returns came from students who enrolled in order to improve their chances of promotion in their present jobs, and a further 18% to move to another kind of job. 74% of returns from those in their early 20's were concerned with promotion.
- 00.12 Over three-quarters of the returns came from students who were satisfied that they had received sufficient details before the residential schools, with females being more likely to be satisfied than males.
- 00.13 Although only 42% of the returns came from students stating that they preferred the month in which their residential schools were actually held, only about 20% definitely stated that they preferred an earlier or a later date. Over a quarter did not reply to this question.
- 00.14 The largest number of returns (40%) came from students who ranked practical or laboratory work as being the most important feature of their residential schools, and this reflects the practical nature of many of the subjects. However, assigning weightings to the order of features resulted in an overall ranking of meeting lecturers as most important, followed by practical work and subject lectures.
- 00.15 Only 6% of the returns came from students who thought that residential schools were not needed for their subjects, and two-thirds thought that they were indeed essential.
- 00.16 A majority of returns expressed satisfaction at the opportunities to meet lecturers, meet students, subject lectures, group discussions, and practical or laboratory work. Almost two-thirds stated that there had been no AV equipment on display (a specialised feature not applicable to most residential schools) and three-quarters that residential schools had not been used for tests or examinations. Under half of the returns expressed satisfaction with opportunities to use the College library. Considerable dissatisfaction was recorded regarding opportunity to use the College library (28%) and the feature of subject lectures (23%).
- 00.17 Only 4% of the returns were from students expressing dissatisfaction with administrative arrangements, with 68% thinking them good or very good.

- 00.18 Many returns took the opportunity to include comments about the administrative arrangements. The highest number (25) concerned registration times but 14 returns particularly mentioned that administrative staff (especially at registration) were helpful. Meals and accommodation brought 11 comments.
- 00.19 Only 3% of the returns were from students expressing dissatisfaction with administrative staff's helpfulness, with 70% thinking it good or very good.
- 00.20 Some 7% of the returns were from students expressing dissatisfaction with the academic activities, but 68% stated that they were good or very good.
- 00.21 Many students took the opportunity to make free comments about the academic activities. These were wide-ranging, but clusters included staff helpfulness (described by one as 'superb'); a request for more lectures; and a feeling that there was too much laboratory work for the time allowed.
- 00.22 Some 7% of the returns expressed the opinion that lecturers' helpfulness was not satisfactory, but 76% said that it was good or very good.
- 00.23 Although 21% of the returns indicated some degree of negative feelings towards the influence of the residential school on their attitudes to their courses, 78% stated that their favourable attitudes had been either improved or maintained by attending the schools.

0. INTRODUCTION

- 0.1 Residential Schools are held in connexion with subjects and courses taught to external students. Not all subjects have residential schools, however, but where offered attendance is compulsory.
- 0.2 The College has not in the past comprehensively evaluated residential schools, although individual lecturers have in some cases attempted to obtain feed-back by various means on their own subjects. The questionnaire used in the present survey was adapted from one used by the author in connexion with a single course of study between 1978 and 1980 inclusive. It was sent by mail to students who had attended residential schools during the Spring semester of 1980 in an attempt to obtain an overall picture of the reaction of external students to their residential school experiences. Reports on individual courses and subjects will be prepared for the lecturers concerned.

Questionnaires sent out to 509 students (N)	Questionnaires returned by 292 students		Usable Questionnaires	
	(N)	%	(N)	%
785	470	57.4	465	59.2

- 0.3 Questionnaires were sent to 509 students who attended a total of 785 residential schools in the second semester of 1980, and replies were received from 292 students (57.4%). In all 59.9% of the questionnaires were returned, but some of these

indicated that the students had either withdrawn from the subject or had been excused from attendance for medical or similar reason. The present report is therefore based on a total of 465 questionnaires. There is a very slight over-representation of students who attended more than one residential school.

A. GENERAL

1. TYPE OF COURSE OF RESPONDENTS

0.1 Your Present Course

Table 1.1	Types of courses of respondents (N=465)	
	Number	% of N
2 year Assoc.Dip.	72	15.5
3 year Diploma	5	1.1
3 year Bachelor's degree	362	77.8
1 year Grad.Dip.	11	2.4
Other	7	1.5
No reply	8	1.7

- 1.1 Most of the students (77.8% of the returned questionnaires) were enrolled in 3-year Bachelor's degree courses, with a further 15.5% of the questionnaires coming from students enrolled in 2-year Associate Diploma courses. As part-time students they would normally take about six and four years respectively to complete the courses externally.

2. SPECIFIC COURSE OF RESPONDENTS

2.1 Name of Course

Table 2.1		Course Titles
<u>Soecialist Diplomas</u>	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Grad.Dip.Clinical Science	4	0.9
Grad.Dip.Educational Leadership	7	1.5
<u>Degrees</u>		
Accountancy	1	0.2
Administration	17	3.7
Applied Biology	133	28.6
Wine Science	106	22.8
Library & Information Science	2	0.4
Life Management: Comm.Soc.Services	78	16.8
Life Management: Consumer Affairs	25	5.4
Secondary Education	13	2.8
<u>3-year Diplomas</u>		
Primary Education	1	0.2
<u>2-year Associate Diplomas</u>		
Administration	7	1.5
Computing	9	1.9
Laboratory Technology	34	7.3
Medical Technology	5	1.1
Viticulture	17	3.7
<u>Conversion</u>		
Teacher Conversion Course	1	0.2
<u>Approved Service Course</u>		
Consumer Affairs (Home Economics)	5	1.1
	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>465</u>
		<u>100%</u>

2.1 The largest group of students consisted of those enrolled in the B.App.Sc. (Applied Biology) course, followed by those enrolled in the B.App.Sc. (Wine Science) course and the B.A. (Life Management) Community Social Services strand. It is emphasised that the interdisciplinary nature of courses means that students from different courses will attend the same subject residential school.

3. SUBJECTS STUDIED

3.0 Subject for which you attended the August/September residential school (give code and name of subject.)

Table 3.1 Residential School Subjects		<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u> (N=465)
ADM1114	Quantitative Management 1	16	3.4
BCM2033/4	Clinical Chemistry 1	4	0.9
BCM2044	Food Analysis	4	0.9
BCM2054)	Biochemistry 2	4	0.9
BCM3013)		18	3.9
BIO1023/4	Biology 1A	35	7.5
BIO2023/4	Microbiology 1A	21	4.5
BIO2053	Invertebrate Zoology	12	2.6
BIO2093/4	Histology 1	5	1.1
BIO2103/4	Haematology 1	6	1.3
BIO3023	Vertebrate Physiology	15	3.2
BIO3093	Virology	7	1.5
CHM1053/4	Chemistry 1B	49	10.5
CHM2013/4	Organic Chemistry 1	3	0.6
CHM2023/4	Physical Inorganic Chemistry	10	2.2
CHM3033	Analytical Chemistry 2	3	0.6
CON1013	Consumer Affairs 1A	16	3.4
DTA1013	Computing 1A	29	6.2
DTA1033	Computing 1C	7	1.5
DTA1043	Computing 1D	1	0.2
DTA1213	Systems 1A	1	0.2
EDL4046	Educational Leadership	7	1.5
ENG2723	Viticultural Irrigation	17	3.7
ENG3313	Winery Engineering 2	16	3.4
GEL1023	Geology 1B	5	1.1
GEL2023	Geology: Stratigraphy & Sedimentation	1	0.2
GEL3023	Geology 3B	2	0.4
GEO1023	Geography 1B	3	0.6
GEO3023	Quaternary Geomorphology	2	0.4
LMN2023	Community Work	14	3.0
LMN3013	Case work	5	1.1
LMN3023	Group Work	6	1.3
LMN3113	Personal Development	7	1.5
LMN3123	Problems in Life Management	8	1.7
PHY1023	Physics 1B	2	0.4

PSC2023 Plant Production 1	3	0.6
PSC2063/4 Plant Physiology 1	19	4.1
SOC1113 Australian Society	32	6.9
STA1013 Basic Statistics	8	1.7
STA3013 Biometry 1	1	0.2
WSC1023 Wine Science 1B	14	3.0
WSC2023 Appraisal of Wine and Brandy	13	2.8
WSC3013 Wine Science 3A	6	1.3
WSC3023 Wine Science 3B	5	1.1
Not stated	3	0.6

3.1 Returns were received for 44 subjects, and the subject with the largest number of returns from students attending the residential school was CHM1053/4, with 10.5% of the total number of returns. This was followed by BIO1023/4 (7.5%) and SOC1113 (6.9%). The duration of the residential schools varied between one day and eight days, but the shorter ones were usually scheduled to allow students to attend two or more consecutively.

B. PERSONAL

4. SEX OF RESPONDENTS

	<u>No. of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Female	182	39.1
Male	282	60.6
Not given	1	0.2

4.1 Almost 61% of the questionnaires returned by students came from males.

5. AGES OF RESPONDENTS

5.0 Age Group

Table 5.1		Age Group	
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>	<u>Cumulative percentage</u>
Under 21	22	4.7	4.7
21 - 25	98	21.1	25.8
26 - 30	138	29.7	55.5
31 - 40	143	30.8	86.2
41 - 50	48	10.3	96.6
51 - 60	14	3.0	99.6
Not given	2	0.4	100.0

5.1 The largest age group is for those in their thirties (nearly 31%) but this is closely followed by those in their late twenties (nearly 30%). Although half (50.8%) of the returns were from students in their twenties, those in their late twenties and their thirties accounted for 60.4% of the returns. The 20's - 30's age group was responsible for 81.5% of the returns.

6. HOME STATE

6.0 Which State are you living in?

6.1 The distance travelled by students may be an important factor in whether students attend residential school, and in fact many were compulsorily withdrawn from the relevant subjects because of non-attendance. (90 people were so withdrawn from 115 subjects compulsorily, and others had previously withdrawn voluntarily). Students were not asked for an estimate of the actual distance travelled.

The geographical distribution may also be seen as an indication of how students see their home states as offering the courses which they want by an appropriate mode of study.

Table 6.2		Home States	
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u>	<u>(N=465)</u>
N.S.W.	312	67.1	
VIC	76	16.3	
A.C.T.	11	2.4	
QLD	23	4.9	
W.A.	4	0.9	
TAS	3	0.6	
S.A.	33	7.1	
Overseas	2	0.4	
Not stated	1	0.2	

6.2 Although just over two-thirds of the returns came from students living in New South Wales, all States except the Northern Territory were represented. However, NSW is a large State and many students living in NSW would have been committed to considerable investment of fares and travelling time in addition to the actual accommodation and residential school time. The pattern indicates the presence of Riverina College in the eastern States of Australia.

7. HOME TOWN

7.0 What is the population of your town?

7.1 The size of town or city will be an indication of the availability of learning resources, it being assumed that the larger places will have better facilities. It may be argued that students who are in smaller places without ready internal access to a university or college are disadvantaged. The contrary viewpoint is that both internal and external study are educationally valid.

Table 7.2 Population of home towns		
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
State Capital	160	34.4
Over 100,000	39	8.4
51 - 100,000	13	2.8
31 - 50,000	46	9.9
21 - 30,000	30	6.5
11 - 20,000	48	10.3
6 - 10,000	27	5.8
Under 5,000	68	14.6
Isolated Property	29	6.2
No reply	5	1.1

7.2 Over a third of the returns came from students living in one of the State capitals but slightly more lived in places with a population of less than 20,000 people. It is unlikely that populations of less than 100,000 could support the learning facilities (libraries, bookshops etc) needed at this level of study. This has serious implications for the College and for individual lecturers, whose duties may include ensuring that students do have ready access to the materials and environment of tertiary study.

8. DISTANCE FROM LIBRARY

8.0 How far away is the nearest library which you find useful for your studies?

8.1 Although the library is not the only resource needed by students, lack of ready access to reading matter and other learning materials is often mentioned as a reason for discontinuing subjects and courses of study. In theory, a local library is the doorway to the whole of the nation's resources through the inter-library loans (ILL) scheme, but in practice the library service often fails to satisfy a need in time.

Table 8.2 Nearest useful library		
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
0 - 5 km	166	35.7
6 - 10 km	85	18.3
11 - 25 km	59	12.7
26 - 50 km	42	9.0
51 - 100 km	38	8.2
101 - 200 km	29	6.2
Over 200 km	44	9.5
No reply	2	0.4

8.2 Over a third of the responses came from students claiming that they lived within 5 km of a useful library; more than half from less than 10 km; and two-thirds lived within 25 km. This is of course no real indication of the potential value of the libraries, but only of how the students perceived their usefulness. It may be that a student records satisfaction with a nearby library because low demands are made on it. On the other hand it is possible in some cases that a student has ignored a nearby library in favour of one further away because its true resources were not known (though this is less likely).

8.3 An examination of the returns shows that 45% of those sent in by students living in the various state capitals claimed to have a useful library within 5 km, whereas 20% of those sent in by students living in communities of under 20,000 people claimed to have to travel over 200 km to find a useful library. Looked at another way 43% of returns from students whose nearest useful library was up to 5 km lived in state capitals compared with 19% of those living in townships under 20,000 population. Of the returns stating that the nearest useful library was over 200 km away, none lived in state capitals and 75% lived in townships under 20,000 or (20%) in isolated properties. However, these expected trends obscure

more scattered tendencies exemplified especially by an examination of the returns which shows that in most of the population categories given in table 7.2 above, the largest groups (sometimes marginally so) of returns claimed a useful library within 5 km. The only exceptions were populations over 100,000 (6 - 10 km), under 5,000 (51 - 100 km), and isolated properties (26 - 50 km).

9. ADEQUACY OF COLLEGE LIBRARY

9.0 Were the library services adequate during residential school?

9.1 Just as the requirements of various subjects and courses of study call for different facilities at local libraries affecting their adequacy, so the College Library's usefulness will vary according to the demands of the residential school students. Some schools may schedule times for library use and may also request that the library be open in the evenings. Students unable to obtain materials easily from their home libraries may seek them from the College library during residential schools.

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u> (N=465)
Good	118	25.4
Adequate	212	45.6
Poor	73	15.7
No Reply	62	13.3

9.2 The above table indicates not necessarily the actual but the perceived adequacy of the College library by students attending the various residential schools, 71% of the returns indicating some degree of adequacy.

C. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

10. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE STUDY

10.0 Have you been an external student before your present course?

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Yes	79	17.0
No	384	82.6
No reply	2	0.4

10.1 Almost 83% of the students had not had experience as distance students before enrolling in their present courses at Riverina College. However, although slight differences in responses to individual questions are noted, the previous experience of students does not seem to have any marked effect on their opinions regarding these residential schools.

11. REASONS FOR ENROLLING

11.0 Why are you taking this course?

11.1 Students were presented with the following four possible major reasons and asked to tick one or to indicate a fifth reason applicable in their cases.

- (a) To improve chances of promotion in present job.
- (b) To move to another kind of job.
- (c) To improve my general knowledge.
- (d) To help spend time interestingly.
- (e) Other.

Table 11.2 Reasons for enrolling		
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
(a) promotion	236	50.8
(b) move	82	17.6
(c) improve	57	12.3
(d) interest	10	2.2
(e) other	76	16.3
(f) no reply	4	0.9

11.2 Bearing in mind that the reasons why students enrol in (and withdraw from) courses of study are complex, the present table suggests that about half of the returns came from students who had enrolled in order to improve their chances of promotion in their present jobs. However, a further 18% of the returns came from students who hoped to use their eventual awards to move to another kind of job, and many of the 12% from students hoping to improve their general knowledge must in fact also have been vocationally-oriented.

11.3 A cross-tabulation using sex of respondent shows that males are somewhat more likely to give promotion as a reason than females are, and that the latter are marginally (though not significantly) more likely than males to give the other reasons. As might be expected all the returns indicating study as a "pass-time" occupation came from the over-thirties, whilst none of the returns from students under 21 years marked a change of job as a reason for enrolling. In the 21-25 age group 74% were interested in promotion -- the highest proportion of any group though the lowest (for the 51-60 age group) was still 36%. Other high percentages were 24% in their thirties enrolling with a view to changing their jobs, and 23% in their forties enrolling for general knowledge.

D. RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPECTATIONS

12. SUFFICIENCY OF DETAILS

12.0 Were you given sufficient details about what would happen at residential school, before you arrived?

12.1 It is suggested that anxiety will be reduced if students are informed not only of the timetable to be followed at the residential school, but given some indication of the content of the programme. This enables students to decide whether to bring certain materials with them, to read about some topics before-hand, or to consider the alternative transport arrangements in the light of the need for a car during the residential school.

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Yes	356	76.6
No	103	22.2
No reply	6	1.3

12.2 Just over three quarters of the returns indicated satisfaction with the sufficiency of the information sent to them. Female students were somewhat more likely to express satisfaction (81%, 73%) than male students, but the most marked association is seen when cross-tabulating by course and subject. All students were sent a 5-page information document as well as timetables about three weeks before the schools, and in June were sent an accommodation booking form.

13. PREFERRED MONTH

13.0 When would you have preferred the residential school to be held (and why)?

13.1 The residential schools in this survey were all held in late August and early September, during the mid-semester break. This meant that students had been

studying their second (Spring) semester subjects for about five weeks before attending the schools, and would have received two of the normal four mail packages.

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of Returns (N=465)</u>
February	1	0.2
May	1	0.2
September	2	0.4
October	7	1.5
December	1	0.2
as held Aug/Sept.	195	41.9
not school holidays	14	3.0
school holidays only	38	8.2
"later" or "earlier"	81	17.4
not Saturdays	1	0.2
not mid-holidays	1	0.2
no reply	123	26.5

13.2 The highest group of returns (42%) came from students expressing satisfaction with current scheduling, and it may be assumed that the 8% emphasising in school holidays only and most if not all of those not replying were also satisfied. 17% preferred an earlier or a later date (usually the latter) without actually specifying a month.

14. IMPORTANCE OF FEATURES

14.0 Rank the following features in order of how important you think they should be for this residential school.

14.1 Students attend residential schools with certain expectations and awareness of needs; sometimes their experiences alter their conceptions. The following is an attempt to obtain from students an idea of the importance which they attach to certain features following their recent residential school experiences.

Table 14.2	Importance of features (N=458)									
	<u>1st</u>	%	<u>2nd</u>	%	<u>3rd</u>	%	<u>4th</u>	%	<u>5th</u>	%
Meet lecturers	108	23.6	121	26.4	79	17.2	67	14.6	45	9.8
Meet students	40	8.7	64	14.0	92	20.1	86	18.8	77	16.8
College library	3	0.7	13	2.8	36	7.9	65	14.2	93	20.3
Subject lectures	106	23.1	108	23.6	74	16.2	76	16.6	43	9.4
Group discussions	11	2.4	62	13.5	89	19.4	77	16.8	94	20.5
AV equipment	1	0.2	10	2.2	12	2.6	21	4.6	37	8.1
Practical/laboratory	182	39.7	67	14.6	53	11.6	33	7.2	35	7.6
Tests/examinations	1	0.2	5	1.1	9	2.0	14	3.1	12	2.6
Other	3	0.7	3	0.7	1	0.2	3	0.7	3	0.7
	<u>6th</u>	%	<u>7th</u>	%	<u>8th</u>	%	<u>9th</u>	%	<u>No Reply</u>	%
Meet lecturers	20	4.4	4	0.9	1	0.2	0		13	2.8
Meet students	46	10.0	26	5.7	9	2.0	0		18	3.9
College library	121	26.4	80	17.5	20	4.4	2	0.4	25	5.5
Subject lectures	27	5.9	6	1.3	2	0.4	0		16	3.5
Group discussions	62	13.5	32	7.0	8	1.7	1	0.2	22	4.8
AV equipment	58	12.7	148	32.3	109	23.8	4	0.9	58	12.7
Practical/laboratory	28	6.1	35	7.6	9	2.0	0		16	3.5
Tests/examinations	59	12.9	87	19.0	212	46.3	19	4.1	40	8.7
Other	4	0.9	1	0.2	17	3.7	94	20.5	320	71.8

14.2 The responses to this particular question will naturally vary not only with the student composition of the group, but also with the individual subjects being studied. The largest number of returns (39.7%) came from students who ranked practical or laboratory work as first. Next came meeting lecturers (23.6%) closely followed by subject lectures (23.1%) as first choice. This indicates the very practical nature of the subjects in which the residential schools were held at that particular time, which may not hold true for first (Autumn) semester subjects.

14.3 An attempt was made to obtain an overall ranking by means of assigning scores for each category:

1st rank = score of 9

2nd rank = score of 8

3rd rank = score of 7

etc

no reply = score of 0.

These were summed and the mean used to obtain a final ranking in the following table.

Table 14.4		Scores for ranking features (N=458)		
	<u>Total Score</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Rank Order</u>	
Meet lecturers	3214	7.02	1	
Practical/laboratory	3153	6.88	2	
Subject lectures	3137	6.85	3	
Meet students	2697	5.89	4	
Group discussions	2511	5.48	5	
Use College library	2004	4.38	6	
AV equipment	1382	3.02	7	
Tests/examinations	1196	2.61	8	
Other	238	0.52	9	

14.4 A surprising result emerges when ranking the mean scores. Although the largest group of returns marked Practical/laboratory work as the most important feature of the residential school, the mean scores place meeting lecturers first, followed by practical/laboratory work and by having subject lectures. The expressed need to use residential schools as a time to meet lecturers and discuss personal study problems is one which has been found in other studies (Reid-Smith 1979, pp. 17-18; 1980a, pp. 21-24; 1980c, pp. 17-20). Frost (1980, p. 79) says that staff at Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education "are firmly of the opinion that the greatest need of external students is that of staff:student contact, and, almost equally, contact with other students", and Hartridge (1980, p. 90) write that: "Lecturers must be prepared to make themselves available in the evening or during sessions when the work is flexible..."

15. NEED FOR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

15.0 Do you think that a residential school is actually needed for this subject, for educational reasons?

15.1 In some courses and subjects, residential schools are held at the instigation of the lecturers concerned, whilst others are offered because of instructions by the NSW Higher Education Board. Yet others are scheduled because of a feeling by the College that residential schools should normally be held unless there is a clear case for not doing so. There is a difference of opinion concerning the need for compulsory residential schools not only within the College but in the world of distance education. The present question was directed to discovering whether the students thought that a residential school was essential, desirable or not needed.

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u> <u>(N=465)</u>
Essential	309	66.5
Desirable	124	26.7
Not needed	29	6.2
No reply	3	0.6

15.2 The result is an overwhelming demand for residential schools by those who actually attended. Two-thirds of the returns said that such schools were essential, and only 6% thought that they were not needed at all. We may assume that students opining that a school is essential would not be unfavourable to them being compulsory, as no doubt would also a proportion at least of those who thought a school desirable.

15.3 What the present survey does not show is the large number of students who either withdrew from a subject before attending the requisite residential school, or were compulsorily withdrawn from the subject by the College for failing to attend without a valid reason. Smith (1975, p. 4) had suggested that compulsory residential schools were for some people a barrier to benefitting from distance education because of the time and money needed to attend residential schools. (This reasonable argument was not confirmed by a questionnaire sent to 167 students who failed to attend the September residential schools, because of the low number of respondents. In many cases it appears that finance was only one of several deciding factors for many students, although it was the chief for some.) The present survey was restricted to students who had ordered their life priorities in such a way as to be able to afford to attend, and who had not been

actively prevented from doing so. In this respect they may be typical of residential school attenders, but not of all students enrolled in distance education courses.

16. SATISFACTION WITH CONTENT

16.0 How did you actually find the following features when you attended the recent residential school?

16.1 The features listed were the same ones as given in section 14 above, and this question was asked in order to see how each feature fulfilled satisfactorily the students' needs in these areas.

	<u>Number of Returns</u>				<u>% of Returns (N=465)</u>			
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Not Applicable	No Reply	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Not Applicable	No Reply
Meet lecturers	411	41	8	5	88.4	8.8	1.7	1.1
Meet students	438	7	15	5	94.2	1.5	3.2	1.1
College library	212	131	114	8	45.6	28.2	24.5	1.7
Subject lectures	297	106	55	7	63.9	22.8	11.8	1.5
Group discussions	280	72	102	11	60.2	15.5	21.9	2.4
AV equipment	94	34	306	31	20.2	7.3	65.8	6.7
Practical/laboratory	297	69	86	13	63.9	14.8	18.5	2.8
Tests/examinations	78	19	346	22	16.8	4.1	74.4	4.7
her	14	13	113	325	3.0	2.8	24.3	69.9

- 16.2 The greatest number of returns (96.2%) expressed satisfaction with the opportunities of meeting other students, and also the least number expressing dissatisfaction. One may wonder at the students who marked the "not applicable" boxes in respect of meeting students and lecturers. Almost 9% were not satisfied with the opportunity to meet lecturers however, and although this is not a high figure it is a reminder that external students may wish to see lecturers in other subjects of their courses whilst at residential school.
- 16.3 Not all features were applicable to each residential school; for example three quarters of the returns indicated that tests or examinations formed no part of the residential schools, and two-thirds stated that using Audio-visual equipment was not a feature. Two features do cause surprise. Firstly, a quarter of the returns claimed that use of the College Library did not apply to their residential schools, and more than a quarter expressed dissatisfaction with time to use it; less than half expressed satisfaction. Not all subjects are highly book-based, of course, but in an external course students must rely quite heavily on library and other information sources. Table 16.2 may be examined in the light of table 9.2 above as far as time to use College Library facilities is concerned.
- 16.4 Secondly, another feature needs to be considered carefully by staff organising residential schools: the place of formal lectures and of group discussions. There is a feeling among distance educators that lectures (which in the live situation may involve only monologue) can equally well be in the form of printed or audio comments in mail packages. From this it follows that residential schools should not be used

for low-interaction features such as lectures, but rather for high interaction such as personal tuition and group discussions (as well as practical work). An exception would be where a feature such as a film cannot be included in a mail package; in this case it can be shown in residential school and used as the basis for interaction. With 22% of the returns stating that group discussions were not applicable (i.e., not a feature) and a further 15% recording dissatisfaction, it is suggested that the College should offer assistance to lecturers in strengthening these as a feature of residential schools.

- 16.5 It is not clear why 23% of the returns expressed dissatisfaction with lectures. Some students may feel that lectures should form a major feature of residential schools, to compensate for being "deprived" of this traditional academic service as external students. Certainly lectures may be used to guide students through opposing theories for example, or to summarise what would otherwise take a time-consuming search on the part of the students. Lectures do have their place, but it is suggested that there may be a difference in presentation of lectures for internal and external students, as the former have more opportunity for other personal contact and College resources.

17. IMPRESSIONS OF ADMINISTRATION

- 17.0 What was your overall impression of the administrative arrangements for the residential school by the College?
- 17.1 The questionnaire did not provide any definition of 'administrative arrangements', but it could cover anything such as food and accommodation, timetabling, coffee breaks, prior instructions, signposting, and teaching equipment which worked. These services are

provided by many people who contribute to the success (or otherwise) of residential schools, and form the initial impact between student and College.

Table 17.2 Administrative Arrangements

	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u> <u>(N=465)</u>
Very good	109	23.4
Good	206	44.3
Adequate	122	26.2
Poor	16	3.4
Very Poor	4	0.9
No reply	8	1.7

17.2 With two-thirds of the returns stating that they found the administrative arrangements good or very good, and only 4% poor or very poor, it appears that the co-operative efforts to ensure the smooth running of residential schools was quite successful. Just over a quarter unenthusiastically thought the arrangements were 'adequate', but overall the feeling was favourable.

18. COMMENTS ON ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

18.0 Any other comments on the administrative arrangements?

18.1 This open-ended question provided an opportunity for students to record specifically their favourable and unfavourable thoughts about administrative matters, and as the returns were anonymous it was hoped that comments would be frank and helpful for future planning. A very wide range of comments resulted; these were summarized in twelve categories from which the following extracts are taken.

18.2 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The large number of comments on these topics indicates the diverse needs for information felt by external students. Although some may appear trivial from the College viewpoint they all indicate the existence of the insecurity which many students have. Whatever is important to the student is important to the College.

Comments:

Poor signposting of buildings, toilets etc	5
Residential school manuals late	3
Duration of R.S. incorrectly advised	3
New students need more information	2
Other points	6

18.3 REGISTRATION AND COLLECTING ROOM KEYS

This is the most important of the three main impact times for students attending residential schools (the others are: arrival in the City of Wagga, and the initial R.S. opening session). It presents particular difficulty to the College, because students may arrive at any time of day or night.

Comments:

More staff on duty would reduce waiting time; times for collecting keys should be extended; registration should coincide with train, bus, plane and car arrivals.	25
key collection system after office hours excellent.	1

18.4 STAFF

People are the most important feature of a residential school, and students' perceptions of their contact (or non-contact) with staff play a large part in their overall feeling of satisfaction and achievement.

Comments:

Administrative (especially registration) staff very helpful	14
would like to meet External Studies staff	4
difficult to make appointments with other lecturers or registrar's office	3
other point	1

18.5 PRACTICAL WORK FACILITIES

Comments:

Inadequate computer time; over-crowded science laboratories; shortage or broken equipment	5
Impressive work of lecturers in preparing laboratory sessions.	2

18.6 RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Comments:

Improvement over previous residential schools	7
Large numbers and diverse groups will always present problems	2
Other point	1

18.7 Other categories were:

MEALS AND ACCOMMODATION	11
TRANSPORT	4
LIBRARY	4
TIMETABLING	6
PROBLEM SOLVING	3
COLLEGE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE	2
COURSE WORK	7

19. ADMINISTRATORS' HELPFULNESS

19.0 What was your overall opinion on administrative staff's help?

19.1 The previous two questions had been concerned with how students viewed what was happening administratively, regardless of whether that perception was accurate. The present question was an attempt to discover how students felt about the administrative staff whom they met as people at residential school, rather than the administrative arrangements themselves.

Table 19.2		Administrative staff's help	
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns</u> (N=465)	
Very good	139	29.9	} 70.3
Good	188	40.4	
Adequate	103	22.2	
Poor	12	2.6	} 3.0
Very Poor	2	0.4	
No reply	21	4.5	

19.2 With 70% of the returns expressing a positive opinion regarding the helpfulness of the administrative staff with whom they came in contact (22% "adequate" and 3% unfavourable opinion), there was somewhat greater appreciation of the staff than of the arrangements (cf. table 17.2). A further indication of this is that somewhat more thought the staff "very good" than thought the arrangements "very good".

20. IMPRESSIONS OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

20.0 What was your overall impression of the academic activities at this residential school?

20.1 Without defining "academic activities", this is one of the major questions asked concerning the students' impressions about their residential schools. Although the administrative image is also important, students do attend residential school viewing it as an academic segment of their courses and subjects.

Table 20.2		Academic activities	
	<u>Number of Returns</u>		<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Very good	117	} 315	25.2
Good	198		42.6
Adequate	110		23.7
Poor	25	} 34	5.4
Very Poor	9		1.9
No Reply	6		1.3
			67.7
			7.3

20.2 Two-thirds of the returns expressed positive appreciation (good/very good) of the respective academic activities, but 7% were negative (poor/very poor) in their reaction. These figures are similar to those in table 17.2, indicating that there was little difference between opinions concerning the administrative arrangements and the academic activities.

20.3 Any mismatch between a student's expectations regarding what will happen at residential school and what actually is provided is a potential source of dissatisfaction. This may be particularly so at a first residential school when students have to rely on pre-school information and their own imaginations in order to envisage the possible satisfaction of

their academic needs. For example, a student may feel a need for lectures during residential school, to satisfy a wish to experience what is thought to be the normal College way of life. The use of seminars instead of lectures may lead to a sense of dissatisfaction, unless the student is prepared beforehand for the chosen format and topics.

21. COMMENTS ON ACADEMIC MATTERS

21.0 Any other comments on academic matters?

21.1 This open-ended question allowed students to note their specific thoughts regarding the academic content of the residential schools. The wide range of comments have been summarised as follows.

21.2 GENERAL COMMENTS ON RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

There were several comments of a general nature concerning the residential schools, but no point was mentioned by more than four students. One person thought that there was no need for a school (and three objected to one day schools), and another philosophically stated that we cannot expect miracles given the various problems. A sixth person merely thought them "too difficult", whilst a seventh observed that a student got out of a school as much as he was prepared to put in. The point was also made that the diverse experiences of students should be used during residential schools. Four noted that better structuring (notes, timetable) would be welcome, and two that residential schools resulted in a great volume of subsequent work in writing up. A student wanted to know beforehand what would be studied at the school, whilst another expressed appreciation that the small numbers attending allowed individual participation.

The comments may be summarised as follows:

Needs better structuring (notes/timetable)	4
One-day schools not worth expense	4
Too much time wasted	3
Other comments	13

21.3 STAFF

Surprisingly few comments were made about the lecturing staff themselves, but as expected from such a large sample the comments ranged from 'intolerant' to 'superb'.

Staff coped well/superb/helpful	14
Poor staff knowledge or techniques	8
Demonstrator or tutor unhelpful	4
Need better access to lecturers and course advisers	4
More staff needed for practicals	1

21.4 METHODS: DISCUSSIONS & AV

Students volunteered few comments in these areas:

Good to discuss rather than read (More discussions needed)	9
AV sessions good	1

21.5 METHODS: LECTURES

There is an indication from students' comments that many would like to have either more lectures or a greater balance between lectures and practical work during residential school. Lectures are seen as a means of acquiring encapsulated knowledge, and may be to some students a visible sign of the College as a community with personal staff/student and student/student involvement.

More (or evening) lectures, more demonstrations, or too much practical work	12
Lectures need more organisation	4
More examples of practical application needed	3
Other points (contradictory)	3

21.6 METHODS: LABORATORY WORK

Many of the subjects require attendance at residential schools in order to ensure that practical experiments are successfully undertaken, but there is a widespread feeling that as reported by Peter Smith (1977, p. 4) "The amount of practical work that has to be squeezed into the Science residential school makes it all difficult to assimilate". A shortage of materials and equipment (some apparently because of non-delivery of a consignment) also caused comment in 1980.

Laboratory work rushed/too mechanical to be assimilated	24
Materials shortage/equipment not working	10
Lectures and experiments out of phase	10
Laboratory sessions well prepared	8
Time wasted on ill prepared experiments	5
More varied practicals needed	1

21.7 MISCELLANEOUS: COURSES IN GENERAL

A few general comments were made in this section as some students interpreted 'academic activities' as covering extra-school matters.

Lecturers' notes sometimes unclear/not proof read	8
Some subjects seem irrelevant to the course	3
Lecturer helpful in answering enquiries	2
Other points	5

22. LECTURERS' HELP

22.0 What was your overall opinion of lecturers' help?

22.1 This question was asked in an attempt to estimate how helpful lecturing staff were seen to be as people.

Table 22.2		Lecturers' help	
		<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Very good	} 352	225	48.4
Good		127	27.3
Adequate		75	16.1
Poor	} 34	26	5.6
Very Poor		8	1.7
No Reply		4	0.9

22.2 Three-quarters (75.7%) of the returns expressed a positive opinion regarding the helpfulness of the academic staff (lecturers and demonstrators) with whom they came into contact (16% "adequate" and 7% unfavourable opinion). This indicates that not only were more students favourably impressed by the helpfulness of the academic staff than by the academic activities, but this feeling was held much more strongly concerning the staff. This is specially important in view of the fact that the returns ranked meeting lecturers as the most important feature (see tables 14) of the residential schools.

22.3 There is a substantial degree of association between the opinions concerning academic activities and those concerning lecturers' help, but there is also considerable evidence of independency of opinion. For example, whereas 88% of the returns which stated that the academic activities were "very good" thought that the lecturers' help was also "very good", only 46% of those responding "very good" regarding lecturers also made the same response regarding activities. (In fact, 45% of the returns indicating that lecturers' help was "very good" stated that the activities were somewhat less-strongly "good").

23. ATTITUDE CHANGE

23.0 Was your attitude to the course improved (or favourably maintained) by attending this residential school?

23.1 This is a crucial question. Although we are interested in analysing students' feelings concerning individual features of residential schools, we do have the ultimate question of the overall impact of residential schools on students. It must be borne in mind that students who had withdrawn from their courses already were not included in this survey, and that these 465 returns represent some 59% of the actual attendances.

Table 23.2	Favourable attitude	
	<u>Number of returns</u>	<u>% of returns (N=465)</u>
Very much	176	37.8
Somewhat	187	40.2
Not really	76	16.3
Definitely not	23	4.9
No reply	3	0.6

23.2 The responses of a fifth (21%) of the returns indicated some degree of negative overall feeling to the course following the residential school, that is there was no improvement in attitude and no previous favourable one. 5% of the returns in fact were emphatic that there was no favourable resulting attitude to their courses. On the other hand a positive feeling was expressed by 78% of the returns, with 38% making this point strongly. (A four-category response was allowed to ensure that students had to commit themselves on this point, though in fact the responses to five-category items suggest that students did usually commit themselves on other matters also.)

23.3 Students attending residential school normally do so at some cost: they may disrupt family life; be

expensive; take a valuable holiday or working time; entail exhausting uncomfortable journeys. Students arrive with certain expectations, hopes and fears. They have unfelt needs which residential schools may expose. Many feelings and experiences are involved in coming to a conclusion regarding any particular residential school, and this conclusion may not be the same as the one reached when the course is finished and the graduation ceremony has taken place.

- 23.4 Bearing all this in mind, student satisfaction (as compared with achievement) is important in that dissatisfaction may well lead to withdrawal from a subject or course. The present study has attempted to identify some areas of student interest which are within the province of the College as far as residential schools are concerned. The present sample of returns indicates that there is some association between the resulting attitude and both academic activities and lecturers' helpfulness. There is somewhat lower association between resulting attitude and administrative arrangements and administrative staff's help. Perceived contact with the administrative people and services at residential school is small, whereas students arrive with academic preconceptions. Even though all services are important, the student sees some as being more important than others. (It is not suggested that there is a causal relationship, though the matter of association is being re-examined).

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