

Identifying Support Needs of Maori Students Enrolled Extramurally at Massey University

BARBARA BROOKFIELD AND LOUISE MACFARLANE
MASSEY UNIVERSITY REGIONAL OFFICE
HAWKES BAY

INTRODUCTION The 1987 report of the Universities Review Committee to the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee identified the low participation of Maori people in university study as being of great concern. Since then all New Zealand universities have appointed Maori liaison staff to assist in recruitment of Maori students. The numbers of Maori students enrolled at Massey University more than trebled between 1987 and 1994.

Massey University has provided support to internal students on campus with the appointment of a Maori Learning Support Consultant, but it faces the dilemma, given time and financial constraints, of how to provide targeted assistance to the increasing numbers of students enrolled extramurally.

The number of students enrolled at Massey University claiming Maori ethnicity has increased 42 percent in recent years from 1 657 in 1992 to 2 401 in 1994. In 1994 Maori students comprised 9.2 percent of Massey University's roll compared with 3.6 percent in 1986. This has resulted from targeted recruitment of Maori students since the appointment of a Maori Liaison Officer in 1987, and increasing awareness amongst Maori of the value of obtaining a tertiary education. Unemployment and the increasing pressure from employers on workers to gain new qualifications and skills, and to upgrade existing ones, have also contributed to the increase. In 1994 1 336 Maori students were enrolled extramurally at Massey University and 1 033 were enrolled internally. Although targeted support is available to Maori

students enrolled internally from the Maori Learning Support Consultant there is no targeted support available to extramural Maori students.

Substantial funding has been made available to support Maori education at the primary and secondary level through Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa, but there is little assistance available at the secondary and tertiary level. Massey University faces the dilemma of how best to provide targeted assistance to the greater numbers of Maori students enrolling extramurally, given existing time and financial constraints. In recent years there has been rapid expansion of student numbers without a comparable increase in resources. The performance of Maori students at tertiary level has been lower than that of non Maori. Durie predicted in 1989 that 'unequal inputs will be necessary to ensure some equality of output'. However, adequate funds required to resource increased input for Maori students at the tertiary level has not been forthcoming from Government.

A commitment to providing learning support to Maori students enrolled internally was made in 1990 with the appointment of a Maori Learning Support Consultant in a half time position. This position was funded initially by the Vice-Chancellors' Contestable Equity Fund and the intention was to promote greater retention of Maori students by encouraging the development of study skills, and through better utilisation of existing support services available on campus. The extramural regional adviser

network was also partially funded from the Contestable Equity Fund, but funding was withdrawn in 1992 after the passing of the Education Amendment Act 1991. Since then the University has funded these positions.

The Hawkes Bay and Poverty Bay regions contributed 489 (20.7 percent) Maori students to the Massey University roll in 1994. Of the students enrolling at Massey University in 1994 who identified themselves as Maori 345 (14.6 percent) were from the Hawkes Bay region and 144 (6.1 percent) were from the Poverty Bay region. The two tribes in the region are Ngati Porou (Poverty Bay) and Ngati Kahungunu (Hawkes Bay) and in 1994 14.2 percent of Maori students enrolling at Massey University belonged to Ngati Porou and 17.2 belonged to Ngati Kahungunu.

The purpose of this preliminary research project as to develop an overview of the difficulties which extramural Maori students in Hawkes Bay and Poverty Bay encounter. This information will be useful in deciding on the allocation of resources for meeting student support needs in the future.

STUDENT SURVEY All 269 students enrolled extramurally at Massey University in March 1995 who live in the Hawkes Bay and Poverty Bay regions were sent a questionnaire in early April. Completed questionnaires were received from 92 (34 percent) students. The questionnaires contained 25 questions and took approximately ten minutes to complete. Most questions required the student to respond by ticking one or more boxes but in many questions students were given the opportunity to provide additional comments if they wished. The final question invited students to comment on any aspect of their experience of studying extramurally with Massey University. This elicited a wide range of responses providing a useful insight into the individual student's feelings and experiences.

STUDENT PROFILE Sixty six (72 percent) of the respondents were women and 24 (25

percent) were men. Two students did not answer the question on gender. The proportion of respondents who were women was higher than the proportion of women Maori students on the extramural roll. In 1994 63 percent of Maori extramural students were women.

Twenty four (26 percent) of the students had enrolled at Massey University for the first time in 1995 and 22 (24 percent) were students undertaking their second year of study. Nineteen students (21 percent) had been enrolled for five or more years. The respondents, therefore represented a group of students with a wide range of study experience. Fifty one (55 percent) respondents were studying, towards qualifications in the Humanities and Social Science faculties and fifteen (16 percent) were completing Business Studies qualifications. Nine students (10 percent) were completing post graduate qualifications and the remainder were studying at the undergraduate level.

Sixty one students (66 percent) were in paid employment and of these 49 (53 percent) were in full time paid work. Eleven (12 percent) were in part-time paid work and one student was on paid study leave. Twenty seven students (29 percent) were not in paid employment. This is higher than the 21.5 percent of extramural students enrolled in 1994 who were not in paid employment.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE Most students first became aware of Massey University's extramural programme from a local tertiary education provider such as their local polytechnic (22 percent), from Massey University publications (21 percent), from a friend or family member (36 percent), or from their employer (10 percent). Only three (3 percent) found out about the extramural programme through advertising. This supports the University's low level of expenditure on advertising and its commitment to providing high quality comprehensive publications about the programmes offered. There is a high level of awareness of Massey University's extramural programme in the Poverty Bay and Hawkes Bay communities.

Nearly all respondents (92 percent) plan to enrol extramurally in future years indicating high motivation amongst Maori students, and a high level of satisfaction with their programmes. One student commented, 'I thoroughly enjoy my studies. It has become my favourite pastime'. Another student who had been enrolled internally said, 'The switch to extramural study perfectly suited my study needs. Study time is flexible and the tutors are very supportive. The library service is excellent'. Three of the students not re-enrolling extramurally were planning to enrol internally and two were completing their qualifications.

Students were asked their main reasons for studying extramurally. They were permitted to give more than one response. Sixty four (70 percent) were studying to complete university qualifications and 23 (25 percent) wished to obtain a university credit. Forty five (50 percent) were studying for personal interest and 49 (53 percent) said their studies would assist them in their work.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED Students could select from a list of ten items relating to problems or difficulties experienced during their extramural study. They could tick as many as they wished and also had the opportunity to specify problems they had encountered which were not included in the list.

Forty four (48 percent) students experienced conflicting demands on time because of work commitments. This was the most common difficulty experienced. As 61 respondents were in paid employment, nearly two thirds of the students who are in paid employment have difficulty balancing the demands of study and work commitments. Cull Sligo's findings in a 1991 study of students enrolled in a 100 level management paper support these results. She found that two thirds of students who withdrew were over-committed at work. Some respondents commented that the University's shift to semesterisation increased the conflict. One student wrote that 'the switch to semesterisation has necessitated considerable

changes and sacrifices' as she juggled her commitments to extramural study, full time employment and parenting. She found it extremely difficult to find 15 hours per week to devote to her study of one paper.

Whanau commitments posed difficulties for 34 (37 percent) students. A student completing the last paper for her degree commented that extramural study was 'a very long lonely experience'. Although she could be with her whanau 'the balance of roles as student, full time employee and parent makes it difficult to give quality time to my whanau'.

A significant number of students, 26 (28 percent) experienced difficulty understanding the study guides or readings and 23 (25 percent) had difficulty understanding what was expected of them. When asked in what ways material could be presented to them that would make it easier to understand, 43 (46 percent) said they would like to have regular tutorials with local tutors. Twenty three students (25 percent) said they found it difficult working in isolation from other students. Despite student preference for face to face contact with tutors and for contact with peers, the numbers attending regular regional tutorials offered in recent years has declined to the extent that most of these programmes have been discontinued. Demands of employment, family and community commitments are the reasons cited for students being unable to attend tutorials offered. However, 53 (58 percent) respondents were planning to attend the short regional and campus courses offered in 1995.

Students are proactive in developing peer networks. Fifty one (55 percent) had made contact with other Massey University students in their region and 27 (29 percent) had joined a study group. One student said, 'I have surrounded myself with other students who are old hands at extramural study' and another 'made use of my personal networks when I needed help'. Some students described their reluctance to seek assistance: 'I believe the help and assistance is there but often feel shy and hesitant in interacting with the various processes in place for my benefit'.

In the final open comment question four students complained about slow turnaround of assignments and highlighted the need for prompt feedback on their work. Five students commented that late receipt of study material created difficulties for them that they could not overcome. Delays in confirming enrolments can occur because insufficient information has been supplied. 'The mere fact of locating and informing Iwi groups will in itself not be enough. Increasing Maori participation levels in education requires guidance through procedural matters' (Durie *et al.* 1989). It is important that admission and enrolment procedures are culturally sensitive and do not discourage Maori students..

Forty three (47 percent) students felt that presentation of study material on video cassette tapes would assist their understanding of the material while 29 (31 percent) audio cassettes would assist them. This indicates a preference for aural learning in combination with the visual mode offered by the monochromatic printed material the students receive. Seventy five students (81 percent) have the use of an audio cassette recorder and 70 (76 percent) have a video cassette recorder. Whilst 49 (53 percent) have the use of a computer only 10 (11 percent) respondents felt presentation of material on computer disk would assist their understanding of the material. A small number of papers already use these methods along with printed material in their delivery. Daley (1989) suggested that audio tapes, to be a successful mechanism for delivery of study material, must be integrated into the course and 'have to cause, encourage, require a student to respond in some way or another'. The same could apply to video tapes and computer disks.

Financial difficulties were experienced by 32 (33 percent) students. Thirty four students (37 percent) said they were not aware of sources of financial assistance available to them. Students were asked from what sources they had sought financial assistance. Nineteen students (21 percent) had taken out a student loan and 18 (19 percent) had applied for Manaaki Taura funding. Ten students (11 percent) received a

training incentive allowance from New Zealand Income Support Service and six students (7 percent) received assistance from their Iwi. Thirty three students (35 percent) said that lack of finance had prevented them enrolling or completing their study in the past. Lack of finance and knowledge of sources of financial assistance are an important factor which limits participation and the success of Maori students enrolling extramurally. As one postgraduate student said, 'I have overcome most difficulties except financial'.

Forty students (43 percent) had withdrawn from papers they had enrolled in at some time in the past. The main reason for withdrawal cited by 25 of these students was that the workload was too heavy. Six students found the content of the paper inappropriate to their needs and five said the material was too difficult to understand. This rate of withdrawal is similar to the annual withdrawal rate for all extramural students. A literature search indicated that lack of time is the reason most commonly given from withdrawal from extramural courses (Tremaine, 1978; Hooper, 1990). However, Hooper (1990, 98) felt that 'lack of time may be a euphemism for inability to cope with the course content'. Although students who had already withdrawn from their course this year were asked to return the questionnaire, the responses indicated that few had done so. Further research on the attrition rate of Maori students is required.

Although the questionnaire focused on the difficulties experienced, most students took the opportunity to comment on favourable aspects of their extramural study experience. Many students expressed appreciation for the encouragement and assistance they had received from their course controllers and some singled out individuals for special praise. Students also commented on the accessibility and approachability of course controllers. This supports Baath's (1982) findings that the warmth and enthusiasm of tutors motivated distance learners.

Some students expressed appreciation that they now had the opportunity for tertiary education

which they had been denied in their youth. One student said extramural study 'enhanced academic and communication skills. Massey University has given me the sound education I didn't otherwise have and it has given me a vision to succeed in life'.

CONCLUSION This study of Maori students enrolled extramurally in 1995 who live in the Hawkes Bay and Poverty Bay regions found that students experienced difficulty finding adequate time for study because of work and whanau commitments. Many students also had difficulty understanding the study material and what the course controller required of them. Other studies have shown that lack of time is the most commonly cited reason for student withdrawal from extramural study, and the experience of the Maori students surveyed may not be much different from those of all extramural students. This requires further investigation.

It is well known that 'the Maori cultural way of learning is group oriented' (Mortlock and Birchfield, 1994). Many students felt lack of peer and tutor contact increased their difficulties, but provision of regular tutorials in the past has not been adequately supported. With increasing numbers of students having access to computers, electronic mail communication with a tutor and peers may overcome feelings of isolation. It also offers the opportunity for tutorial assistance. Interestingly only 11 of respondents felt that the provision of material on computer disk would assist their understanding of the study material. More extensive provision of study material on video, audio tapes and CD-ROM may cater better for the preferred learning styles of Maori students. Unfortunately New Zealand is the only country in the western world where there is not an ongoing commitment to fund educational institutions to purchase new technology to assist in the delivery of education.

The numbers of students experiencing financial difficulties which prevent them enrolling or succeeding is of concern, and is likely to increase as students are required to pay for an increasing proportion of their tertiary education. As 37 percent of respondents were not aware of financial assistance available to them, greater effort should be made to raise student awareness of sources of financial assistance.

Extramural study has offered 'a second chance education for Maori people many of whom have been failed by earlier educational institutions' (Durie *et al.* 1992, 21), and respondents indicated a high level of motivation to study, and satisfaction with their programmes. One respondent wrote, 'I myself think that a lot of Maori students like myself have not tasted success, but when you keep telling yourself don't give up, you will succeed. I succeeded in 1994. Now that I have the taste of it I just can't stop. I want more.'

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