

# Tutor training resource

# Unisa COLLEGE REFUGEE STUDENT SUPPORT

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University of  
South Australia

UniSA  
College

# Group Activity:

Have you experienced working with students of refugee backgrounds? (RB)

Explore what you think work with students of refugee backgrounds entails?

Explore myths/stereotypes about what students of refugee backgrounds bring to classroom? How do we know or where do these come from? Do you think these affect how we approach RB students in a classroom?

Is our role in the classroom to challenge these stereotypical perceptions or not? If no, why not? If yes, how do we go about this?



# Students of refugee/CALD backgrounds at UniSA college

Approximately about 20% of our students are:

Humanitarian Visa Holder students

Students represent the following countries:

Afghanistan, Iran and various African nations  
(infographic)

Most are from non-English speaking backgrounds



# Students of refugee/CALD backgrounds at UniSA college

## College RB students are permanent humanitarian entrants

### Who is a refugee?

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

Two-thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan Myanmar and Somalia (UNHCR, 2020).



# Students of refugee backgrounds: Zooming in:

In 2019 we had 59 Permanent Humanitarian Visa students enrolled in UniSA College's pathway programs. The student data includes:

<b>Gender</b>	Male = 29 Female = 30
<b>Age of Students</b>	0-21 = 40 22-24 = 8 26-29 = 4 30-49 = 6 50-59 = 1
<b>Language spoken at home</b>	Arabic, Burmese, French, Nepali, Pashto, Persian, Swahili
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Afghanistan, Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tanzania, Zambia
<b>Program of Student</b>	DArts = 2 DipBusiness = 2 DipHealth = 6 UniSA Foundation Studies = 49

# The issues facing RB students and how they relate to their studies

Student's lives are impacted by intercultural, economic and professional misunderstandings and sometimes-widespread lack of opportunity. Some of the specific challenges noted across the higher education sector for students of refugee backgrounds (SfRBs) include:

- English language skill development
- Academic skills and concepts
- Stigma
- Standardised testing
- Uncertainty
- Expectations of family and friends
- Competing priorities
- Funding and policy
- Navigating the academic culture and systems
- Socialisation, guidance, time management
- Mix of formal and informal support mechanisms
- Poverty, issues of safe housing
- Family dislocation
- Employment opportunities

# The issues RB students face psychologically and how this relates to their studies

- Adverse events and atrocities such as:
  - Passing of a close family member
  - torture inflicted upon themselves or their close family members
  - detention, beatings, terrorist attacks
  - emotional and physical scarring
  - witnessing massacre or murder
  - disappearance of loved ones
  - disability inflicted by violence and sexual assault
  - forcible eviction, separation and migration

(Earnest et al., 2010; Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000)

- Separation from their loved ones at a very young age, leads to :
  - extreme loneliness, guilt and ostracism at an older age (Earnest, et al, 2015; Earnest, et al, 2010 & Humanitarian research partners, 2013).
  - Isolation, bullying, feeling overwhelmed and often failing academically.
  - The physical and psychological effects of past trauma:
    - hinders learning ability
    - slow academic progress
    - absence of concentration
    - challenging classroom behavior
  - (Weeks et al, 2013, Olliff, 2010; Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007).



# The challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds in HE

- The students will have had varying levels of education before commencing university.
- Family and community pressure to aspire for flagship degree programs or careers
- Gendered roles shape educational success and opportunity e.g. female refugee students
- Academically not prepared for university
- Cultural reluctance to seek help – ‘save face’



# Survey data: On challenges students face while studying university



# Survey data: On study support services students feel they need at university



# Focus group: In students' own words...

## Challenges

- Language difficulties
- Work: No permission to work from government
- “Companies asking for experience in Australia”
- No HECS support for those on bridging/temporary visas:

Many RB students (depending on their arrival status) are not able to receive any government payments or HECS or fee help and are required to pay full University fees similar to international students, despite their often humanitarian reasons for being here

- Experiencing racism and sexism

# Focus group: In students' own words...

## Challenges

### Challenges

- Coming from another country with a 'heavy past'
- Stripped off their confidence
- Start from scratch.
- "limited ideas" assumption

### Cultural Barriers

- First time attending university
- 'Nobody wanted to talk to me'
- No friends throughout first semester
- "Muslims are terrorists" stereotypes affect social life

# Student Challenges: feedback from Peer Support Officers

- Struggling with multiple assignments deadlines

Drafting work multiple times and not receiving adequate feedback. Receiving late penalty submission due to other commitments and not understanding the assignment properly.

- Lack of awareness about student support services and online resources

Lack of awareness about where to access enrolment help, counselling services, as well as online resources such as studiosity, study help-pals. Only online resources they know how to access is the library site.

- Lack of awareness about UniSA College student support services

Most students are not aware of the student learning support services that are available through Uni-Mentors and PASS. They get most of their learning support through drafting work and meeting teachers during consultation hours.

Experiencing difficulties with academic literacies and requiring additional help with English language

# Challenging the Deficit Approach: SfRBs aspirations to study

Despite the obstacles and in some cases not feeling sense of belonging students are determined to complete the studies, some are even thriving in their studies

They are inspired by the enhanced career prospects and the sense of pride with many being the first in their families to obtain a university degree (Earnest et al., 2010).

The extraordinary resilience of students in commencing and completing their studies despite multiple stressors and barriers is commendable

# The agency and resourcefulness of refugee backgrounds in HE

- Rather than adopt a deficit approach it is important to focus on what students of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and refugee backgrounds bring to the classroom and on their aspirations to study
- Refugees have already shown resilience, resourcefulness and strength (Olliff and Couch. 2005)
- Although students from refugee backgrounds might not be familiar with some of the skills needed at Australian universities, they are highly capable of learning and adapting and should not be looked down upon as unable to grasp the new concepts

Educators in today's increasingly diverse learning environments need to recognise differences among students and promote effective communication, so that all students (including students from refugee backgrounds) gain competencies that assist them to successfully function in a pluralistic society (Earnest et al. 2010).

The establishment of appropriate cultural and social settings is an integral aspect of the learning process and assists in the realisation of an individual's learning potential and future goals and hopes.

A 'one-size-fits-all' generic model of academic support is inadequate as it does not meet the specific and unique needs of such students (Naidoo and Sidhu, 2018)

There is evidence that effective educational practices, which facilitate students' engagement, provide a boost to under-represented and lower-achieving students commencing tertiary education.



# Focus group: In students' own words...

## Aspirations and Agency

- "If you don't try, you lose...Education was hard but rewarding in the end"
- The proudest moments:
  - "I confronted the person and said "Stop being racist" - I was so proud of standing up for myself...it was a bittersweet victory"
- "College results...Hard work paid off....Process of student life and study is engaging and rewarding"
- "High school didn't go well...Uni provided better support...Higher grades achieved"
- Proud to be offered position as student...

# Focus group: In students' own words...

## Aspirations and Agency

- The proudest moments:
- Stepping out and pushing to try something new:  
*“Coming from another country, I had all confidence lost due to starting from scratch... No one wanted to listen to someone from a 3rd world country with “limited ideas”. But finding place in the (academic) community is my proud moment”*
- Studying medical imaging - told family and they were so proud
- *“Teacher spoke highly about my amazing grades in front of my father”*

# Create a welcoming environment for all students

Welcoming environments create a sense of self-worth, security and belonging that enables students to form new relationships and make new friends.

These in turn further intercultural understanding and promote commitments to justice and equality (Hek, 2005a and 2005b).

- Focus Group Responses

Question: In a perfect world, what would the university look like for a refugee student?

No racism

Equality

Constant support for students

Workshops for refugee students to share their stories with domestic students

No stereotypes

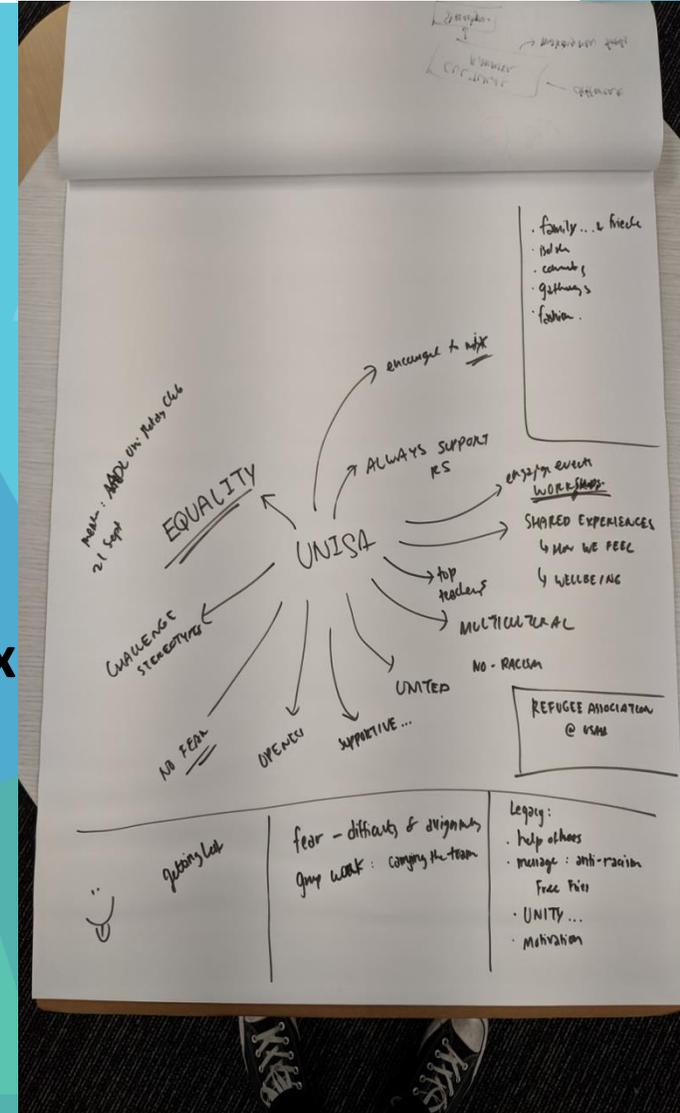
No media influence on race

United community

Better facilitation in classrooms (break cultural groups up and mix)

Engaging events

Teachers are friendly



# At the UniSA College we...

- Work sustainably to provide adequate support services and resources for SfRBs at and outside of university
- We have established ongoing support services for SfRBs at the College
- For academic support students can be referred to Study Support (PASS; established in 2018 and very popular amongst students)
- We have academic literacies workshops (which will be promoted throughout the year)
- There will be targeted workshops across the student lifecycle (UniSA Careers)

# At the UniSA College we also...

Connect students with the external stakeholders  
for:

English literacy (speaking) classes

Visa help

Housing

Employment

# Peer Support Officers: peer-led mentoring and support at the College



**Alphanso Sayee**

Refugee Student  
Peer Support Officer

- College Alumni
- Student of Bachelor of Social Work



**Shakila Orozgani**

Refugee Student  
Peer Support Officer

- College Alumni
- Student of Bachelor of Law

**Teresa Thai**  
August 11  
Meet Alphanso and Shakila your Peer Support Officers for Refugee Students at UniSA College 😊



Alphanso Sayee, Eddie Hamidmanesh and 2 others  
Seen by 21

**COLLEGE HQ**  
FOR ALL YOUR ESSENTIAL STUDY NEEDS

**You've got this!**

**REFUGEE STUDENT SUPPORT**

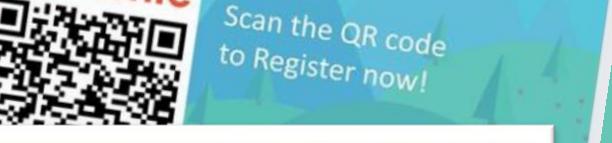
**MY PARTNER TO ACHIEVE**



**Alphanso Sayee**  
October 2 at 4:06 PM  
**Looking to find part-time work over the summer break?**  
Join us for a workshop where you will learn how to build an attractive resume and write a great accompanying cover letter. We will also test your employability and teach you how to sell yourself in a workplace.  
See More

**UnISA COLLEGE REFUGEE STUDENT SUPPORT CAREERS WORKSHOP**

Wednesday 16 October | 11am - 1pm | JS4-11  
**Looking to find part-time work over the summer break?**



**Teresa Thai** is 😊 feeling excited with Alphanso Sayee and James Duku.  
October 24 at 5:37 PM  
We have a winner! Lucky, Alphanso convinced James to come along to the Careers Workshop at the last minute. Everyone who attended automatically went into the lucky draw but there can only be one lucky winner...Congrats James Duku! Spend it wisely!



Alphanso Sayee, Banin Ah and 3 others  
1 Comment  
Seen by 21



# We asked our PSO's what the project meant to them...



# Quick Guide

1. Not all students identify as being of refugee background; allow the student to disclose this
2. Notify the student of the wide-ranging support available at the College (PASS and PSO's) or the support via the SEU (please see the next slide)
3. If the students requires any additional information regarding their enrolment contact the transitioning officer: Lauren Zanker at [lauren.zanker@unisa.edu.au](mailto:lauren.zanker@unisa.edu.au)
4. If the student is struggling with their Program consider contacting the program directors. For Diplomas contact [sarah.hattam@unisa.edu.au](mailto:sarah.hattam@unisa.edu.au). For Foundation Studies contact [tristan.king@unisa.edu.au](mailto:tristan.king@unisa.edu.au)
5. For any other matters regarding English language community speaking classes (to recommend to the student) or visa's, housing and so on contact Snjezana on [snjezana.bilic@unisa.edu.au](mailto:snjezana.bilic@unisa.edu.au)

# Student Engagement Unit (SEU)

<http://i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-engagement-unit/>

Contact SEU for any concerns regarding:

Disability

Counselling

Access plan (learning disability, mental health or other condition that could impact on your study)

Or ask any academic to make a student referral

Questions & Thank you!

**Unisa**  
**COLLEGE**  
**REFUGEE**  
**STUDENT**  
**SUPPORT**



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# References

Earnest, J. et al. (2010) 'Are Universities Responding to the Needs of Students from Refugee Backgrounds?', *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(2), pp. 155–174.

Hek, R. 2005a. The role of education in the settlement of young refugees in the UK: The experiences of young refugees. *Practice*, 17(3): 157–71.

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Olliff, L. and Couch, J. 2005. Pathways and pitfalls: The journey of refugee young people in and around the education system in Greater Dandenong, Victoria. *Youth Studies Australia*, 24(3): 42–6