

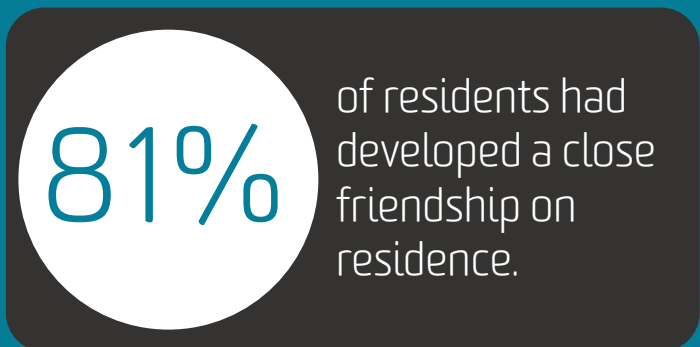
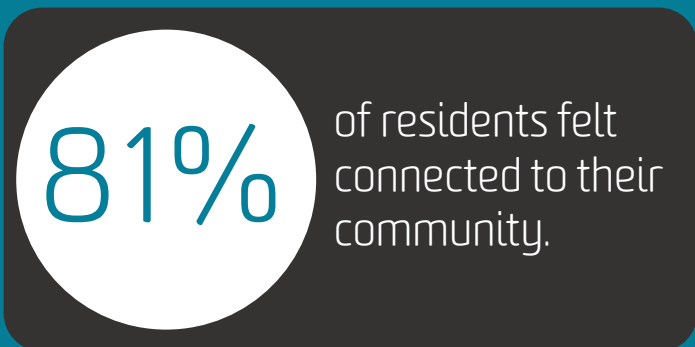


A Sense of Belonging & Community

Students face a range of challenges when adjusting to university life, particularly those who are required to move away from home in order to pursue their studies (Leese, 2010; McInnis 2001; Pittaway & Moss, 2006; Pittman & Richmond, 2010; Wilcox, Wynn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Challenges abound in relation to the realities of a lifestyle involving greater autonomy, increased responsibilities, the development of new social networks, and the precarious balancing act of family commitments, part-time work, study, and social life.

Research highlights that forming positive social relationships, meaningful connections and developing a sense of 'fit' are vital in aiding adjustment and in fostering students' sense of belonging (Cheng, 2004; Cooper, 2009). As Cooper (2009, p. 1) notes, "...all students need to feel they are in a campus community that supports and values them, where learning opportunities are developmental, and where they feel a strong sense of identity and affinity." Effective programming and organized social activities which meet the needs of a diverse student body are also pivotal in achieving such goals (Cheng, 2004).

Deakin Res provides a variety of programs, services, and other initiatives to appropriately and effectively support students' transition to the residential environment, ongoing engagement, and a true sense of belonging to their new place of residence. These commence from the moment of application and progress throughout every stage of the residential journey, including online inductions, webinars, face to face community meetings, student programming, and involvement in online forums. Deakin Res measures and tracks residents' sense of belonging to the community through an annual survey as detailed in the following statistics (Annual Survey, conducted in August 2020, 52% response rate):



5 Ways Deakin Res fosters a sense of community & belonging

1.



Tailored pre-arrival communications and a formal induction.

2.



Targeted residential orientation and transition program.

3.



An inclusive and welcoming community explicitly guided by our RESPECT Values.

4.



Facilitation of diverse and engaging face to face and virtual events and activities throughout the year.

5.



Peer support from trained student leaders with lived experience.

Melanie Koop, Deakin Resident, Warrnambool Campus



For Melanie, community is everything. In her second year as a Psychological Science student, Melanie lives in residence at our Warrnambool Campus. Originally from a small country town called Goroke (near Horsham), she first moved to Deakin in 2020, noting that the sense of belonging, inclusion and community within the Warrnambool residences has been critical to her successful transition to university life.

“When I first arrived, I was initially scared to put myself out there and introduce myself to people, so I spent a lot of time in my room. But the more social events there were, the more connections I made, and the less worried I was about branching out, interacting with and meeting new people. It’s been great to have the chance to make such good friends and to hear about where different people are from, what they’re studying and where they want to go with their degree.”

Melanie highlights that the “small town” nature of the Warrnambool campus has also helped her to get to know the team of support staff in the residences. “The friendly vibe is evident as soon as you walk into res and people are happy to stop and have a conversation with you. Deakin Res staff have also been vital in ensuring I’ve had a great experience. They’re great at encouraging people to connect which has made the process of getting to know people so much easier and less daunting. Alongside my fellow residents, I’ve been encouraged to step out of my comfort zone, try new things and to speak to new people all while having fun doing it.”

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Laura is responsible for the design, development, coordination and continual enhancement of the student experience at Deakin Res, throughout the journey from high school, pre-arrival, orientation and transition and on-campus experience through to alumni engagement. Laura is widely regarded as an industry expert in the theory, planning, and delivery of exceptional student experiences, having honed her skills over the course of a career spanning two decades and multiple higher education institutions.



If you or your students are interested to know more about the opportunities available to live on campus at Deakin in 2021, 2022 or beyond, please contact www.deakin.edu.au/live