



Australian
National
University

Low-SES Student Experience

Report and recommendations

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ANU Engagement and Success

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Executive Summary

The proportion of domestic undergraduate students at ANU that come from low-SES and low-income backgrounds is approximately 4%, by enrolment headcount, of the total domestic undergraduate population. This figure has seen little change for over a decade. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the university experience, including academic success and social engagement, of these students is negatively impacted by their socioeconomic status and there are several structural barriers to their full engagement in university life. Student wellbeing is critical to academic success and retention, and hence there is an urgent need to examine both the barriers to enrolment and their ongoing experience of tertiary education.

The following key barriers to access and inclusion were identified through our research study:

- Lack of, or limited, financial support over the course of the degree program, both in terms of support available and value of said support;
- A lack of sense of belonging in the university setting;
- Feelings of holding a minority status;
- A lack of sufficient academic support and access to the 'hidden curriculum';
- Financial barriers to participation in social and cultural events;
- Perceived discrimination or devaluation by peers and faculty; and
- Costs associated with applying to, and attending university.

A multifaceted approach is required to address the problem, recognising that low enrolment numbers negatively contribute to the ongoing wellbeing of such students as it adds to their perceived minority status. This approach consists of the following components:

1. **Access** - addressing structural and cultural barriers that impede prospective students from aspiring to attend ANU.
2. **Inclusion** - addressing structural and cultural barriers that negatively impact the wellbeing of current students and their academic success.
3. **Monitoring and review** - instituting built-in data collection processes to monitor the efficacy of programs designed to target students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Within the above domains, several activities and policy revisions are possible and are outlined in this report; these include, but are not limited to considerations for:

- revising the criteria for awarding scholarships to consider only need and the impact of compounding need;
- celebrating the experiences of staff and students from underrepresented background;
- creating educational material and an academic mentoring program to address gaps in knowledge of the hidden curriculum;
- subsidizing on-campus accommodation for low-SES students; and
- funding equity tickets for on- and off-campus cultural events such as residential hall commencements.

There are two key barriers to implementation. The first is wider strategic direction and ownership to move from statements in the Strategic Plan to clear operational priorities, direction and ownership to achieve said goals. We acknowledge that work has recently progressed in this space with the recent Admission Reform report and result activities, including the formation of the Scholarship Strategy Working Group and initial steps towards a Student Diversity Plan. A whole-of-university commitment to the above multifaceted approach will ensure a consistent and shared focus, and collaborative approach to reaching the important goals that have been set.

The second barrier at ANU is a lack of stable, long-term funding. Activities that presently target low-SES students are derived from the Higher Education and Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) which is awarded on an annual basis with the amount determined by the number of current low-SES, and now remote and Indigenous, students enrolled at the University. As ANU has the lowest percentage of low-SES students, and forth lowest by count, this has meant a very small funding source meant to be utilised to run almost all equity based programs. The funding for 2022 has gone above \$500,000 for the first time in 10 years with the average annual amount

approximately \$400,000 and annual changes to the amount ranging from \$10,000 to \$122,000, in either direction. This funding is utilised to employ staff, run programs, provide resources, and innovate to ensure we provide the best support to students. The instability and small amount of funding has meant that programs cannot be planned into the future as staff employment and program activities are determined by the allocation. A commitment to funding and consideration of the proposed activities will allow meaningful change to increase the proportion and wellbeing of our low-SES students.

This document intends to inform preliminary discussions and provide suggestions regarding the implementation of interventions and recommendations.

Note: This report is focused on the domestic undergraduate low-SES students as they were the focus of the associated study, however, the ideas and recommendations presented are equally valid for supporting students from a range of traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, and can also set the foundation for considering appropriate supports for postgraduate students from similar backgrounds.

Acronyms and definitions

CASS	College of Arts and Social Sciences
CAP	College of the Asia Pacific
CHM	College of Health and Medicine
CoL	College of Law
CoS	College of Science
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
low-SES	As defined by the Australian Government, an individual who lives in a place that is in the bottom 25% of the Statistical Area 1 (SA1) ranking
low-SES student	Domestic undergraduate student from a low-SES location
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Introduction

The ANU by 2025 Strategic Plan declares that its student body will aim to “reflect the full diversity of modern day Australia”(ANU by 2025, 2021). The data, however, presents a different picture.

Presently, less than 4% of undergraduate students at the ANU come from the lowest socioeconomic (SES) quartile in Australia (NCSEHE). This figure has not changed for over a decade and has decreased in recent years to a low of 3.19 % in 2019 (NCSEHE). This is a stark contrast to the average of 10% in the Group of Eight Universities and 16 % nationally, placing ANU squarely at the bottom (NCSEHE). While the ANU by 2025 Strategic Plan states that ‘talent, realized or potential, will be the only threshold for joining our community as a student’, it seems that promising low-SES students do not make it to our campus. Furthermore, one of the key commitments we have made as an institution is to ‘be the leading Australian research-intensive university measured by recruitment and support of students from Indigenous, rural and low-SES backgrounds’ (ANU by 2025, 2021, p. 24).

The Australian Government has made a commitment over the past 20 years to increasing participation in higher education of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. There has been a significant amount of research undertaken into the barriers that students face to enter higher education (Curtis, Drummond, Halsey, & Lawson, 2012; Fleming & Grace, 2017) as well as their experience during study at broad access universities. What there has been limited research on is the experiences of these students within an “elite” university setting (for exceptions see: Jack, 2019; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). Understanding this unique experience is vital. Due to the low number of students from low-SES backgrounds within these environments, there is an increased feeling of otherness and consideration that university might not be a place for people like them (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021), which increases their likelihood of attrition. This is concerning as it goes against the commitments of the government and many of these universities have made to increase participation.

Through various ANU documents and the words of executive, ANU has made clear an intention to support all ANU students along their academic journey. We take the direction of the University’s motto, *First, to know the nature of things*, and acknowledge that before we enact support for these diverse students, they need to be heard and understood. This report is a step in that direction. To understand this group of students who are an underrepresented but important part of our community, the challenges they have faced and where they have found support to recommend change that positively affects a range of students. Furthermore, this report was inspired by the strong emotional response of our interviewees. The impact of their identity as a low-SES student in an elite university was one of much emotional turmoil that cannot be faithfully conveyed through this report. We encourage readers to refer to Appendix A where we have provide key moments of their experience in their own words. The purpose of this report is thus to detail the rationale, and evidence for interventions to increase access and ongoing support of low-SES students at ANU. It details a multifaceted approach to assess and address key domains of student wellbeing and success. This document intends to inform preliminary discussions and provide suggestions regarding the implementation of interventions and recommendations.

Key issues

There are two key barriers to long lasting, impactful change. The first is ambiguous ownership of implementing support and change. There are clear strategic direction set in the ANU by 2025 strategic plan which states that we will be ‘a standard-bearer for equity and inclusion’ (*ANU by 2025*, 2021, p. 22). This is expanded upon, saying that not only will we recruit students from a diverse range of backgrounds but ‘we will offer support that will enable every student to overcome any barriers they may face and achieve their full potential’ (*ANU by 2025*, 2021, p. 22).

However, beyond the strategic plan, there is no clear plan of action or area leading the work required to set the direction for achieving the goal, and there has not been since the goal was discussed in the ANU Strategic Plan 2017-2021. The ANU Strategic Plan 2017-2021 set a commitment regarding equity, and low-SES, students in particular to ‘increase the opportunities for students from all walks of Australian life to attend the national university, focusing on their potential to thrive at ANU and to contribute to society upon graduation’ (*Strategic Plan 2017-2021*, 2017, p. 10). The outcome of this was a new admissions model, an introduction of central, equity based scholarships, and pockets of people across the University working in silos to create programs and resources to support low-SES students. With a shared goal but dispersed methods, approaches and outcomes it is no surprise the numbers have yet to increase. We must ensure that we undertake a whole-of-university approach, to ensure systemic and institutional change that reshapes the student experience from when the student begins to aspire to university study to the completion of their degree. We begin with this reporting assisting us to identify the barriers we have told students we will support them to overcome.

The second barrier to action on the part of the university is, however, a lack of viable and sustainable funding to support programs and initiatives that target low-SES students. Presently, most activities that target the low-SES student experience at ANU is funded by the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). This funding is reviewed and made available on an annual basis and allocated primarily according to the proportion of low-SES students enrolled at the university.

This causes two problems. The first is that funding for projects and staff is short-term and hence it is difficult to plan for future and ongoing projects due to the uncertainty around financial support. Continued funding is required to implement large-scale projects that would have a meaningful impact on the admission and experience of low-SES students.

Secondly, as funding is contingent on the proportion of low-SES students, there is little additional financial support that can be directed towards outreach and other efforts that aim to increase the number of students from low-SES backgrounds. More funding is required to both support existing students as well as initiate and expand on programs that increase the proportion of students from low-SES backgrounds.

It is therefore critical that long-term funding is allocated to these activities to ensure their continuation and the sustainability of low-SES student support at the university. Given that the university has publicly committed to increasing the representation and experience of low-SES students, the provision of funding to support the proposed activities in this report will play a pivotal role in achieving that aim.

Increasing the representation and experience of low-SES students enriches our campus and is instrumental to fulfilling the university’s position as a leader in positive change and social impact. We therefore hope that this report might guide the approach that is taken to bringing in talented and deserving young people into our community to build leaders that will go on to contribute in their own way beyond their studies.

Approach

This document is the product of qualitative research conducted between September 2020 to April 2022 by Engagement and Success, which operates within the portfolio of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student and University Experience). The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences of low-SES students at ANU. A series of interviews were conducted with self-identified low-SES domestic undergraduate students whose transcripts were independently coded to identify key themes relating to perceived challenges and enablers in their university experience.

The findings of this qualitative study, as well as a review of the extant literature on effective interventions and policies to increase the participation and support of low-SES students at elite institutions, informed the writing of key recommendations detailed in this document.

We aim to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations that seek to address critical gaps in the low-SES student experience as well as mechanisms for further research and consultation for the ongoing improvement of university services and policies with respect to this student demographic. Please see Appendix B for a detailed overview of the research methods and participants.

In this document, we advocate for a multifaceted approach:

(1) Access

The participation of low-SES students at ANU is the lowest of the Group of Eight where the proportion of students from such backgrounds has remained at around 4% for over a decade. It is therefore pertinent that we take steps to examine the reasons for this lack of change that relate to the numbers of students from said backgrounds applying, their admission, and the financial support that they might receive to attend.

(2) Inclusion

Students from low-SES backgrounds at ANU report social, academic, and material challenges which impede their success and wellbeing at university. It is critical to not only consider improving their representation at the ANU, but their ongoing experience and inclusion in university life.

(3) Monitoring and review

Continued engagement with students from low-SES backgrounds is critical to ensuring their unique needs are considered in university policy. We recognize that many processes that might pose challenges to the experience of low-SES students is primarily the product of lack of knowledge. As such, ensuring that the voice of students from low-SES backgrounds is included in decision-making processes ensures that their experience is centered in university policy. Furthermore, there is need to monitor the reach and progress of our proposed activities to ensure that resources are distributed effectively.

This report will be structured according to the above dimensions and will provide a brief overview of proposals that were informed by student interviews and the extant literature. The purpose of these overviews is to identify the gaps that they address, proposals of how they can be implemented, and the bodies responsible for said implementation.

Access

This section of the report will detail the approach to understanding and addressing the barriers to access at ANU as identified by our research. We identified several steps in the aspiration and admissions pathway where the university could intervene to increase the number of low-SES students that choose apply for ANU and subsequently take up their place. The first stage for intervention would be during the period that students are contemplating applying for university; the second stage is when students are in the process of applying; and the third and final stage is when students choose to commence their studies. The proposed target state is outlined at the end of each proposal.

1. Revise the domestic undergraduate scholarships model to consider only need

The most common feedback received from participants in our study was a perceived lack of scholarships and financial support both in terms of number of scholarships available and their value. There was also the perception that financial support was not clearly communicated to students and that they were primarily awarded to wealthier peers. This compounded feelings on not being valued or 'wanted' by the university.

Many elite universities overseas, such as Harvard, offer only needs-based scholarships where admission to the university is combined with a tailored financial aid package (Harvard, 2022). The only criterion for the award is financial need.

Currently there are only 27 unique scholarships to support prospective domestic undergraduate students that consider financial need, these are awarded to approximately 161 students through the Admissions Scholarships Accommodation scheme. Many hardly cover more than half of the expected cost of living at a catered residential hall. None of the most generous scholarships available objectively consider financial need. Many prospective students from low-income cannot take up their place at ANU without generous financial support. Furthermore, a perceived lack of needs-based supports can deter students from applying. Scholarships targeted towards low-SES students is a powerful means to improve self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Means & Pyne, 2017).

ANU has the potential to remove this critical barrier to the participation of low-income students which reflects the model used by several elite universities overseas.

What	Revise the domestic undergraduate scholarships model
Target	Prospective low-income undergraduate domestic students.
Existing infrastructure and policy	In 2022, 27 unique scholarships were given to approximately 161 students who meet some level of equity criteria, including financial hardship.
When	During the decision-making period prior to commencing an application and during the application process
Proposed action	In line with the work commencing with the Scholarship Strategy Working Group, consideration should be given to replacing academic and merit eligibility criteria with needs-based funding for all ANU-managed scholarships. Scholarships could be offered on a pro rata basis according to need and offered at the same time as the offer of admission. The value

	could be determined according to family financial position, estimated cost of living, and other financial supports.
Proposed person/s responsible	Scholarship Strategy Working Group
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number or value of needs-based scholarships for commencing students • Communicate and guarantee scholarships for students prior to taking up their ANU offer • Consider introducing or replacing selection criteria for merit and character scholarships with financial need and on a pro rata basis • Consider alternative measures of financial need beyond SA1 classification to more accurately identify need

2. Collaborate with student-focused groups that target underrepresented youth to encourage aspirations to tertiary education

In an effort to support the aspirations and academic capabilities of students before they would consider university, a partnership is being established between Engagement and Success with and **Student Edge Plus** to provide 1000 free memberships to students engaged with The Smith Family, Barnardo and the Migrant and Refugee Resettlement Service. Additional memberships will be provided to schools we partner with for widening participation programs and School to Tertiary Outreach Mentoring Program (STOMP). This platform provides a range of development opportunities to individuals who would not otherwise be able to access them, allow them to build key skills in leadership, preparing for university, financial literacy, wellbeing and more. In addition to this partnership, we recommend that the University increase the partnership by providing a membership benefit of a waived application fee to their 1.4 million youth-base of individuals aged 14-25.

What	Collaborate with student-focused groups that target underrepresented youth to encourage aspirations to tertiary education
Target	Low-SES schools and communities
Existing infrastructure and policy	Currently various outreach and engagement programs and activities are run in silos across the University, often with little connection or visibility between areas. This includes on-campus experiences, summer camps, and structured outreach activities. Additionally, some student organisations run their own independent outreach activities including Youth Leading in STEM, Robogals, and Engage University Outreach. A staff member within Engagement and Success has just commenced, 1 June 2022, in order to plan and implemented an intentional widening participation program from 2023.
When	Year 6 onward to mitigate aspiration decline
Proposed action	In line with the ANU Student Diversity Plan, undertake an audit of all outreach and widening participation activities to allow for greater collaboration and visibility.
Proposed person/s responsible	Partnership between Future Students Team, Colleges and Engagement and Success, led by ANU Student Diversity Working Group

Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create collaborative structured programs and academic initiatives of outreach and support that benefits students and their communities now and into the future, regardless of their future pathway. • Reduce duplication on targeted schools and communities. • Increase visibility of outreach and engagement opportunities available. • Provide intentional support to nurture aspirations of young people.
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Student Diversity Working Group. The Student Equity Officer, Widening Participation commenced in June 2022 to develop and run programs with further information regarding costs to run programs in 2023 to be forthcoming. Funding would be contingent on the types of outreach and on-campus experiences so they come at no cost to the schools seeking to ensure participation of those who will benefit greatest. Activities would be in collaboration with key stakeholders across ANU, schools and communities, students and families, and key partners, including other universities.

3. Improve the visibility of supports available at ANU for prospective students

The current web pages that are expected to be frequently accessed by prospective low-SES applicants do not effectively communicate the range of financial and pastoral supports available for students at the university. Low-SES Students may be hesitant to apply due to the anxiety from a perceived lack of support at university particularly if they are a first-generation student or from other underrepresented backgrounds. There is therefore a need to consider creating a centralised and visible web presence that highlights the supports that are available over the course of the student's university life, including those that are offered by the university, the ANU Student Associations and Canberra-based services.

What	Improve the visibility of supports available at ANU for prospective students
Target	Prospective low-income undergraduate domestic students
Existing infrastructure and policy	ANU Accommodation, Admissions, and Scholarships web pages do not feature a centralised web page or resource that highlights or lists supports available for prospective students. Although web pages do exist which are directed towards current students, there is less clarity for prospective applicants as to what aids are available once they commence their studies.
When	During the decision-making period prior to commencing an application
Proposed action	Create a centralized repository or summary of supports available for students including ongoing financial support, pastoral care, groceries, mental health, and academic with the aim of clarifying sources of assistance that students might expect to not have access to due to their financial circumstances. For example, highlighting that students receiving Centrelink benefits are eligible for a low-income healthcare card.
Proposed person/s responsible	Student and University Experience portfolio
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a centralized page that lists financial, pastoral, and academic supports for students over the course of their program that specifically targets prospective students

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that supports listed include those offered by the university, the ANU Students Associations and others • Ensure that the web page is visible on websites that are subject to high traffic by prospective applicants including Accommodation, Admissions and Scholarships • Lessen the sense of anxiety for prospective students around the supports available at university • Normalise access to support for all students which is a key element to utilisation
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by Engagement and Success. As current staff are at capacity, an additional staff member would need to be employed to support the development and implementation of this work.

4. Increase the visibility of low-SES individuals at ANU

Students from underrepresented backgrounds may hesitate from applying to the university due to the perception that they do not 'belong' (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021; Jack, 2019; O'Shea et al., 2017).

To encourage tertiary aspiration, the use of media that specifically highlights the experiences and journeys of students from similarly underrepresented backgrounds may help to affirm to prospective applicants that they are wanted and valued in the ANU community.

This may be undertaken at varying points in the application pipeline including marketing material, the admissions page, and accommodation websites. Highlighting how other students have 'made it' may help communicate that attending ANU is a feasible option for prospective students that might otherwise be hesitant. There is value in highlighting members of faculty who also come from underrepresented backgrounds to reinforce and celebrate the diversity at ANU to create a more inviting and welcome atmosphere for applicants.

What	Increase the visibility of low-SES individuals at ANU
Target	Prospective low-income undergraduate domestic students
Existing infrastructure and policy	ANU does not presently feature financial hardship stories on its scholarship portal or Accommodation websites. It is not clear the extent to which stories of low-income students are featured in marketing directed towards prospective students.
When	During the decision-making period prior to commencing an application
Proposed action	Marketing material that highlights the experience and financial supports received by students from low-income and other underrepresented background could be targeting to prospective applicants via material that is distributed to schools and on websites commonly navigated by prospective applicants. The purpose is to highlight that ANU is a financially feasible option and values students from all walks-of-life, as well as share the achievements, academic and otherwise, of others like themselves to build aspiration.
Proposed person/s responsible	Student Recruitment & Admissions and ANU Media

Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create marketing material that features the stories of students and faculty from low-income backgrounds including why they chose ANU, how they were able to fund their place, and their experience of the university • Target marketing material to underrepresented schools • Feature marketing material on ANU financial support pages and accommodation websites
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by Student Recruitment & Admissions and ANU Media as to the potential additional staff resources required to produce and distribute the marketing material appropriately.

5. Provide subsidized accommodation on-campus for low-income students

The opportunity to live on-campus provides substantial benefits for students as reported in our qualitative study and the literature (Hurtado et al., 2007). Students frequently report finding it easier to make friends, feel connected to their university, as well as enjoy greater wellbeing and academic success (Hurtado et al., 2007). In our study, students either expressed regret, or chose to transfer into halls or residence in hopes to expanding their social circle and experiences.

Of all the universities in Australia, ANU is host to the greatest proportion of students that live on-campus, which enriches the community and fosters a unique and welcome culture.

As such, supporting commencing low-SES students with joining the residential hall community has significant benefits for their academic and social wellbeing and enriches their university experience. However, many respondents reported that the cost of living at halls made joining this community financially untenable. There is also the perception that students from particular socioeconomic backgrounds are clustered into particular halls due to differences in costs. Diversifying the on-campus community across residential halls as well as within specific residences enriches campus life and gives students the opportunity to encounter a diverse range of opinion and life experiences in their peers.

There is therefore consideration should be given to put in place a mechanism that allows students to choose a hall of residence based on their individual preferences rather than financial viability. We therefore suggest that we consider an accommodation subsidy for first-year low-income students as it reduces the cost of living and affords them more disposable income to engage in academic and extracurricular pursuits that improve their university experience. We propose that this subsidy is distributed equally across residential halls so that the net cost to students is the same regardless of choice of hall to encourage the equal distribution of students by socioeconomic status across the on-campus community.

What	Provide subsidized accommodation on-campus for commencing low-income students
Target	Prospective low-income undergraduate domestic students
Existing infrastructure and policy	The recently approved Bright Horizons Scholarship provides the recipient with on campus accommodation support for up to three year. This scholarship is available to 20 students who are financially disadvantaged and will commence in 2023. Beyond that, ANU does not centrally offer accommodation subsidies or bursaries that specifically target commencing students at ANU-managed residential halls. Presently, current students are eligible to apply for an Undergraduate Accommodation Bursary but

	preference is given to later year students. Communication on hall-specific financial support is not centralised and clear, therefore advantaging students with insider knowledge.
When	During the decision-making period prior to commencing an application; during application process; commencing studies
Proposed action	Funding, potentially in the form of a bursary or scholarship, would be given to commencing low-SES students to subsidise the cost of their on-campus accommodation, increasing their capacity to do so with peers in accommodation that is the best fit for them.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Residential Experience, University Experience, Coursework Scholarships and Central Finance
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students from low-SES backgrounds have the ability to choose to reside on-campus in residential accommodation – in a residences that best suits their personal preference, by applying through the normal accommodation processes.
Potential resources and funding required	Residential Experience, University Experience, Coursework Scholarships and Central Finance to consider and present to Senior Management Group a proposal in late 2022.

Inclusion

It is important to consider the ongoing experience of low-SES students at ANU to ensure retention. This section of the report will detail three core domains of student success and wellbeing as identified by an internal ANU study: academic, social, and material/physical.

Academic

The following recommendations aim to address the challenges that influence the academic success of low-SES students at ANU. They primarily target barriers related to difficulties posed by differences in cultural capital and access to the ‘hidden curriculum’.

1. Establish an academic mentoring program for commencing students

There is extensive literature in support of the immense value of academic mentoring or frequent interaction with faculty for students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds (Means & Pyne, 2017; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Students interviewed in our qualitative study consistently affirmed that academic staff were instrumental to cultivating a sense of belonging and improving their university experience. There is thus a compelling rationale to formalise and increase opportunities for staff-student interaction via an opt-in mentoring program aiming to improve the academic success and wellbeing of students at the university.

What	Establish an academic mentoring program for commencing students
Target	Commencing and current underrepresented students
Existing infrastructure and policy	There are no formalized academic mentoring programs that specifically target underrepresented students including, but not limited to, low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse, and first-generation commencing and current undergraduate students. A number of peer mentoring programs do exist but there is evidence to suggest that interaction with faculty further enhances wellbeing and academic success.
When	Commencing university studies and over course of degree program.
Proposed action	Create a formalized academic-student mentoring program that is initiated at the beginning of each semester which matches underrepresented students with a member of faculty. The purpose of the mentoring relationship is to provide academic and life advice to the mentee and direct them to university resources where available. Opportunities to meet will be facilitated by a third party via events such as afternoon teas and lunches.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize an academic mentoring program which matches underrepresented students with a member of faculty, ensuring that the program is opt-in • Provide prospective mentors with educational materials on how to interact with their mentee sensitively and appropriately as well as how to guide them to other supports and resources • Facilitate mentor-mentee catch-ups via afternoon tea events or lunches

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide mentees with educational materials on how to ask for help and interact with a member of staff respectfully
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be contingent on the format and inclusions of the program including potentially employing a staff member to support the administration of the program.

2. Increase visibility and suitability of resources related to the 'hidden curriculum'

Students from low-SES backgrounds are more likely to struggle to adjust with the expectations of university life as well as accessing the 'hidden curriculum' which is key to university success (Pyne, 2013). The creation and non-targeted distribution of material that covers the keys to success at university including communicating with lecturers, making use of office hours, and so on, will endeavor to address barriers to students' academic success. Presently, the ANU First Year Experience Program has developed a 'Preparation for University Guide' however, there are more opportunities for co-design and furthering the reach of this material.

What	Increase visibility and suitability of resources related to the 'hidden curriculum'
Target	Commencing and current students
Existing infrastructure and policy	The ANU First Year Experience Program has developed a 'Preparation for University Guide'. However, there are opportunities for student co-design and improvements in distribution of material to reach intended targets.
When	Commencing university studies and over course of degree program.
Proposed action	Work with students to review and improve material addressing the hidden curriculum and ensure that it is distributed to students with the most need.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with students and academic faculty to review and design a handbook that address the hidden curriculum Develop a strategy for distribution that targets with the most need
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be required to support the employment of student leaders to engage in a process of co-design to improve the materials and enact appropriate distribution.

Social

The following recommendations aim to address barriers to the social and cultural participation of low-SES students at the ANU. These seek to target interpersonal challenges faced by students including sense of disconnection to others due to discrimination, cultural differences, and perceived wealth disparity that impact on desire to participate in on-campus life.

1. Improve awareness of diverse socioeconomic experiences among the staff and student body

A common sentiment amongst students interviewed in our qualitative study and the literature is a perceived lack of understanding and sensitivity from peers due to their socioeconomic status (Jack, 2019). Educating students and staff on the diverse experiences of their colleagues and peers may help foster a more welcoming and respectful environment. This should consist of a whole-of-university approach that emphasizes strength-based discourse.

What	Improve awareness of diverse socioeconomic experiences among the staff and student body
Target	Current and commencing ANU students and staff
Existing infrastructure and policy	There is presently no common read for commencing ANU students and staff that specifically comment on the low-SES experience. There are, however, Pulse modules that examine cultural sensitivity but this is only targeted towards commencing staff. A podcast is presently being put together which highlights these stories.
When	Commencement of studies or employment at ANU
Proposed action	A common read will be created that is tailored towards commencing students and staff. The read could cover the need to be respectful of individual's diverse experiences and backgrounds, and low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse experiences. This could consist of a whole-of-university approach that emphasizes strength-based discourse.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with students and staff to compose a common read that details considerations and sensitivities that are expected to foster a welcoming environment for diverse individuals Make the common read available to commencing staff and students
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be determined from consultation with key stakeholders to propose a process and implementation plan and could include the need to employ a staff member to implement and oversee the program.

2. Fund access to social activities and cultural events for students on needs-based scholarships

Study participants reported being unable to participate in social and cultural events due to financial barriers. Removing the costs associated with these activities will allow students to engage with on-campus events such as residential hall commencements and ticketed student society events. Halls, student societies or other relevant bodies would be able to provide free equity tickets that could be billed to the university.

What	Fund access to social activities and cultural events for students on needs-based scholarships
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Target	Current low-income domestic undergraduate students
Existing infrastructure and policy	Certain residential halls and student societies offer equity tickets on an ad hoc and limited basis, usually determined by the funds available. As such, equity ticketing does not necessarily make events more accessible to a larger number of low-income students due to strict quotas. Furthermore, smaller societies and student associations are limited financially with respect to the number of tickets that can be offered.
When	Duration of studies at ANU
Proposed action	Student societies and residential hall committees would be able to provide an unlimited number of equity tickets for students attending on financial-need packages. Such tickets could cover a range of social events including Commencements, balls, and Valetes which would be billed to the appropriate university body. This would seek to ensure that the number of equity tickets that can be provided by the society or hall does not restrict the attendance of low-income students. This could also be expanded to include collaborations with cultural and social events in Canberra such as theatre groups and festivals.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a billing system for student societies and residential hall committees to expand the number of equity tickets available for social and cultural events • Collaborate with cultural and entertainment events in Canberra to provide subsidised equity tickets
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be contingent on the types of student society and residential hall committee events that are approved with the expectation that free tickets would be provided. A staff member would need to be employed to support the administration of the program. A subsidy program could be considered and applied to off-campus events in collaboration with community and events partners, including the ACT Government.

3. Facilitate opportunities for students from low-SES backgrounds to connect

Students from low-SES backgrounds at elite institutions commonly report that a positive factor for wellbeing was meeting students from similar backgrounds (Jack, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017). Due to the relative minority status of these students, it may be difficult for them to cross paths. Thus there is an opportunity to immediately improve sense of belonging and wellbeing by facilitating opportunities for these students to meet each other. However, this activity must be undertaken sensitively to avoid deficit language and accidental othering of students.

In 2022, a First-generation Low-Income Students' Collective was established by the ANU Student Association. Such collectives are commonplace in universities in the United States and reported to be an impactful source of support for low-income students. The university could support this by providing funding to run events as well as potentially provide administrative assistance. It is recommended that such activities are run by students to

support students forming their own communities, developing relationships and determining how they would like to engage and support each other. This also attempts to ensure events appeal to students for which they are intended. This also offers those students leading the activities opportunities to build skills in facilitation and community building, and contribute back to the student community. Students are also more likely to engage in authentic conversation with others like themselves, strengthening the connections and social bonds which they form.

Furthermore, ANU has previously run a scholarship-holders welcome event for students on centrally-managed scholarships. Due to the intersecting nature of challenges faced by students from underrepresented groups, there could be benefits to increasing opportunities for connection between such groups.

What	Facilitate opportunities for students from low-SES backgrounds to connect
Target	Current and commencing low-income domestic undergraduate students
Existing infrastructure and policy	In 2020, there was a welcome tea for students receiving centrally managed scholarships to connect students receiving equity-funding which may be continued in the future. The ANU Students Association established a Facebook group for first-generation and low-income (FGLI) students in 2022.
When	Duration of studies at ANU
Proposed action	ANU could consider further support student-run collectives for low-income and first-generation students via the provision of funding or assisting with the administration and marketing of such collections. The existence of the collective would be indiscriminately advertised to commencing students. ANU could also collaborate with key partners such as The Smith Family and the Country Education Foundation to hold welcome events for commencing students and continue to organise events such as the 2021 First-Generation Celebrations co-designed with students.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide financial support to the ANU First-Generation and Low-Income Students Collective • Advertise the Collective to commencing students • Continue to run morning tea events for commencing students receiving centrally-managed scholarships • Engage with key partners such as The Smith Family to organise welcome events for commencing students
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be contingent on the types of events and resources that are proposed. The Student Equity Officer, Current Students, within Engagement and Success would support the administration of the program.

Material and physical

This section details recommendations seeking to support the ongoing physical and material needs of students. It looks to address financial barriers that impair the physical wellbeing of students not addressed by the two previous sections.

1. Increase the visibility of free food for students

Food insecurity is a major barrier for students that live off-campus or in self-catered halls of residence. It is essential to ensure that vulnerable students are aware of supports available around food on-campus. Food pantry services and programs, such as Universal Lunch Hour (ULH), were identified by our students as invaluable resources over the course of their studies. Whilst many programs do exist or commence in Semester 2 of 2022, the visibility of such services is less clear. Presently, ANUSA and PARSA run a number of free food services. In addition to this, ANU is launching the Community Connect Space in the latter half of 2022, which aims to complement the programs administered by ANUSA and PARSA. Community Connect is a food pantry that is available for the entire student community and operates on a point-based system. These points can expand to provide extra support for students with additional needs. With the litany of food support available, it is critical to advertise their availability to students most in need.

What	Increase the visibility of free food for students
Target	Current and commencing ANU students
Existing infrastructure and policy	ANUSA and PARSA use social media to promote the availability of food pantry services. In preparation for the launch of Community Connect, a webpage has been created that collates information on ANU- and community-based support services for students including food pantries.
When	Duration of enrolment at ANU
Proposed action	Consultations with on- and off-campus students seeking to identify the best methods to advertise the availability of food pantry services. Advertising would be directed to both commencing students and later year students.
Person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult with students and staff to compose identify a marketing strategy to best target commencing and current students• Work in collaboration with self-catered residential halls to advertise food pantries• Work in collaboration with student societies to advertise food pantries
Resources and funding required	Funding is allocated from the HEPPP allocation to support this work.

2. Provide subsidized gym and sport memberships to students receiving a needs-based scholarship

Access to equipment and clubs that promote physical and wellbeing is limited significantly by their cost. The provision of a subsidised membership to ANU Sport clubs and gyms would encourage uptake by students that are otherwise deterred by fees.

What	Provide subsidized gym and sport memberships to students receiving a needs-based scholarship
Target	Current and commencing low-income domestic undergraduate students
Existing infrastructure and policy	There are presently no subsidised gym or sport membership arrangements for low-income students.
When	Duration of enrolment at ANU
Proposed action	Consider giving domestic undergraduate students at the ANU on needs-based scholarship the option of taking up a subsidised ANU gym or sport membership.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Sport
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making subsidised sport and gym memberships available for low-income students • Increasing the participation of students in health-promoting physical activity
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Sport.

3. Establish a 'Start Up' grant

The purpose of a Start Up grant would be to provide funds to cover miscellaneous costs that assist with students settling into university such as a computer or a bike. This one-time grant would be offered to commencing students at the university who are on needs-based financial supports.

What	Establish a 'Start Up' grant
Target	Commencing low-income domestic undergraduate students
Existing infrastructure and policy	There are presently no grants available that are not strictly for academic or emergency purposes targeted at commencing students.
When	First year of study
Proposed action	This one time grant would be offered to commencing students at the university who are on needs-based financial supports.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success

Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support students with the purchase of miscellaneous items to help with settling in, including purchasing a bike or computer
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success. Funding would be contingent on the number of grant applications and eligible students. The Student Equity Officer, Current Students, within Engagement and Success would support the administration of the program.

4. Provide targeted support for off-campus low-SES students

A large portion of low-SES students live off-campus, either by choice or due to the cost of on-campus accommodation. Targeted support could be implemented seeking to address the needs of these students.

What	Provide targeted support for off-campus low-SES students
Target	Off-campus low-SES students
Existing infrastructure and policy	Off-campus students are able to apply for an equity membership with Griffin Hall, the non-residential hall.
When	Duration of enrolment at ANU
Proposed action	Off-campus domestic undergraduate low-SES students could be eligible to receive subsidies and access to key support including subsidised parking fees and pre-paid bus cards, mobile internet devices, and utility grants. Consider reestablishing the ANU Virtual Information Commons to support students' ability to utilise key academic software as necessary.
Proposed person/s responsible	ANU Engagement and Success, Griffin Hall, Parking Office, ITS
Desired outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support off-campus students attend campus to participate in academic and social activities Ensure off-campus students can safely access online services and academic software whenever necessary Equitable support low-SES students regardless of their living arrangements to reduce the cost-of-living associated with living in Canberra Provide free membership to Griffin Hall to all off-campus, low-SES students
Potential resources and funding required	To be determined by ANU Engagement and Success, Parking Office, and ITS. Funding would be contingent on the number of applications for each various element. The Student Equity Officer, Current Students, within Engagement and Success and Non-Residential Hall Coordinator (Griffin Hall) will lead the administration of the supports.

Monitoring and review

Continued engagement with students from low-SES backgrounds is critical to ensuring their unique needs are considered in university policy. We recognize that many processes that might pose challenges to the experience of low-SES students is primarily the product of lack of knowledge. As such, ensuring that the voice of students from low-SES backgrounds is included in decision-making processes ensures that their experience is centered in university policy. Furthermore, there is need to monitor the reach and progress of the proposed activities to ensure that resources are distributed effectively.

We recommend including the low-SES student voice as an important stakeholder for a range of discussions including those relating to scholarships, accommodation, and academic matters.

Furthermore, it is critical that we monitor our proposed and ongoing support and engagement programs to ensure their efficacy and impact. We recommend using the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) Guidance Manual to inform future monitoring and evaluation efforts (DESE, 2022). We advise that the recommendations that are outlined in this report are further discussed with the following stakeholders:

- Service consumers
 - Low-income and low-SES students including prospective and current students
 - Faculty members
 - Students from other underrepresented backgrounds
 - ANU Student Association
 - Student societies
 - Residential halls
- Service providers
 - Engagement and Success
 - Student Safety and Wellbeing
 - Counselling
 - Access and Inclusion
 - Coursework Scholarships Office
 - Accommodation
 - Admissions
 - Heads of residential halls
- Government and policy bodies
 - Senior Management Group
 - Department of Education, Skills and Employment
 - National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Consultation and feedback

Consultation and feedback on this report was sought from areas across the University with feedback provided from:

- ANU College of Law
- Admissions Reform

- Equity and Belonging
- Student Safety and Wellbeing
- Coursework Scholarships Office

Appendix A

In their words

This work was undertaken through interviews with students to provide them the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. The following pages are selections from their stories that we believe are important to share to allow them to speak for themselves, and because hearing from them directly is more powerful than anything more we could say.

Cass

“So, I mean the time of university has been pretty hard because I basically, uh, yeah, you have to be self driven in basically everything you do or you get, um, you know, just, just saving up money to get computers or like working extra time. Um, basically my time at university has been much more extended than I would have, would have planned it to have been. “

“I got into the bachelor of commerce and I didn't really have much confidence in myself and my skills. So I went back to ANU College. Everyone basically said, you don't need to do this. Um, but basically I did that. So I had to do that to learn the skills and get the confidence that I needed because basically everything I submitted, it was fine. I only, even when I didn't submit a couple of assessments, I still passed, um, whatever it was. So that's basically how it started for me. “

“I would have really loved the opportunity to live on campus. I mean, I know there's Griffin Griffin Hall, um, but I wasn't, I would have loved to have been more actively involved in some of those communities, um, which was harder as kind of like a domestic Canberran student with not with not much money or anything. It was just, uh, for me it was hard to find kind of people that could relate. “

“Um, basically the biggest thing for me was having a connection with the tutors and lecturers. Um, yeah, so that kind of helped me invest a bit more in my own, uh, like education.”

“I moved in with my mom. So basically I, uh, grew up with my dad and we'd visit, uh, my mom, every, every fortnight sort of thing, cause dad won custody. So I didn't really live with mum before. Um, but after I was kicked out, I, you know, I kind of ran out of money living out of home and that kind of stuff. Um, yeah, just living at my moms was nice.”

“one semester, um, I wasn't well enough to study, but also I didn't have a place to live, so I enrolled in courses, so I would get the payment from Centrelink so I could have a place to stay. “

“If parking was easier, I would go to campus more often because that's the thing you feel low SES, and you don't have a computer, printer, whatever you go to use the library. So you have to like work around your hours to go use the library when it's free or there less people and that can conflict with your jobs or whatever? “

Charlie

“I haven't really properly selected, I feel like my whole journey at ANU has been really complicated and, um, inconsistent... the reason why I chose to come to Canberra and ANU specifically when I could have stayed in [my hometown] was, um, I felt like it would've been a, a more direct pathway into, to be able to, for a chance to work in the Department of Foreign Affairs or any other government department that requires someone with a talent of languages”

“I say the most challenging thing is I feel like there's a lack of a connection or support. Um, I, I never got the chance to stay on campus, um, because the, the initial offer, they gave only like two days to respond and it was way too expensive. I'm pretty sure I sent them my healthcare

card and explained to them, I definitely come from low income family. I cannot afford this and they weren't willing to give another offer. It was like 'you had to take this offer or you miss out'. I had no choice.”

“I guess like the most challenging part was just trying to maintain a positive attitude when I haven't been successful as I would, with a lot of things, I felt like the things that weren't in my favor was because I didn't have the financial capacity to pursue something better. I couldn't afford to rent closer, I couldn't afford to, um, have my own control of transport. I couldn't afford to, um, choose what I want to eat. I just have to choose what I was able to eat. I'm doing slightly better now, but still it's like, it's getting tiring.”

“I'm good at scraping money. Um, but at the same time, scraping money, doesn't help with, as I learned in a hard way, maintaining consistent, um, quality of study.”

“Because of how disconnected I feel from ANU and how off campus I am, um, I'm lucky that I'm part of a church community that's pretty much everywhere around the world, um, who happens to, you know, have local Canberrans, they work locally, they're in governments, they're in ANU, um, normal, everyday blokes, whatever kind of people you can imagine that existing Canberra. Um, and yeah, they've been, I don't know, they've been more of a motivation and mentor than, um, anything else I feel like perhaps it's like being in a, such a kind of relatable community. “

“And it's, it's just too much to be able to juggle both study and work, especially if I don't have control of where I stay, where the work is, places and, um, schedules become disruptive. It just causes a lot of other problems. So, um, I will only just like give up my summer holidays just to rack up money to keep up with the year.”

“Um, during my first year I would just go to the library and just keep borrowing from the library. Um, yeah. um, I also understand that like, I, I don't have easy access to internet. It's only like this kinda past year that I started to be able to afford internet. Previously I, I only had to, I could only go to the library for internet. Um, so when I get home I have no internet. Um, Yeah, so it, it was a bit of a struggle when COVID started last year and the new internet plan didn't come in for a while. Uh, but it's better now. Um, but yeah, I guess it's just access to resources and also just how, at least where I see things like something that seems like really no nu- really low number with a dollar sign for me, it's a really high number with a dollar sign. It's like the way I see it's like that's like worth two of my meals or like a week's worth groceries.”

“I do have to like kind of cut and give up a lot of things I want to pursue. I wanted to, I was hoping maybe I could pursue a double degree, more studies. Uh, as much as I was able to enjoy some of the international relations classes I was able to get into, um, and yet I wasn't able to do very well on it because it's very demanding and I'm able to do all my languages because I actually had the previous background in it. Um, like I don't know it's, I guess what I'm trying to say. It's like, I felt like I kind of to give up on a couple of my dreams coming here and it, it kind of breaks my 14 year old heart. “

Gerald

“I hadn't really considered ANU until I saw the bachelor of health science. So, um, I tried to get into undergrad med, uh, undergraduate medicine, but I was unsuccessful. And then, um, I was accepted into the ANU bachelor of health science program. And then after, um, so before, when I was applying to ANU, that's when I really found out about all the opportunities that have on offer. And then, um, yeah, it was kind of a, a split decision. It just, the offer came in January, like out of nowhere. Um, and that was just like, yeah, I'm going to go for it.”

“I'd say definitely um, it would really be the kind of academic kind of, um, expectations. So, um, uh, while I, while I can't say I've been doing that badly, I would say that in terms of the grades I've been achieving, they haven't really been what I've been wanting to achieve or what I would expect... I'd definitely say that in terms of meeting, um, meeting the general standards, I'd say, um, everything's really there in terms of tutors and like course convenors that help you a lot. I

guess um, with me it's interesting cause I have like a separate kind of set of standards for myself and meeting those um, I guess it's just a challenge for me, but I definitely say ANU provides a lot of support in, especially getting people over the line and really, um, succeeding, on average."

"I think, um, being at, at my [residence] and there being students that are exactly like me, but one year ahead has enabled me to have someone to talk to and go to for a bit of support."

"Um, I think it's like being from a bit of a lower SES background is something that is part of my identity, but people don't really see that much. Um, when going to my-, like being a part of my [residence] in particular is a very interesting thing...because, um, like my [residence] has a reputation for... being of selecting people from a certain background. Um, or like, uh, from a certain like private school, like, um, like old money kind of like background. And whenever I tell people I'm part of that [residence] people have that assumption. So, um, yeah, that's something that I maybe would like to, um, like let people know about me is that I'm not just like that resident."

"I think the most, the biggest thing that, um, becomes evident is when I'm not around that much because of working commitments and I think that's the way, most things, um, how low-SES, uh, like the, the manifestation of that in general is that people aren't able to participate as much in things because they're too busy working to provide for themselves."

"I'd say, um, my background has made me, I think, more attuned to a lot of social issues. I think being, um, from the, from a background where I was witnessing a lot of things that are in the news and media, it's made me seem a bit more switched on and, um, it's made me definitely more of an advocate. So I'm engaged in a lot of groups on campus and, um, campaigns within societies and departments."

"Like ike being from a low socioeconomic background, in a sense, I think a lot of students want to hide that fact or keep it separate because while like you can, while there isn't really, there wouldn't really be that much like discriminational prejudice, it's just the fact that you have like friends who will go like, Oh, should we like invite them to that stuff? What if he can't afford that, like, Oh, maybe we should just like, like you don't want to have people change their behavior around you just because of that. But then again, there's that line because it's like, on the other hand, like there are people that make jokes about certain things or act in certain ways that can upset people, low SES backgrounds, like saying things that kind of like implied, like there lives are all set little like saying something like, 'Oh, I'm so poor. Like I can't like eat out everyday'. Like there's like basic like, like statements people can say, or they can say something like, 'Aw, my car is so bad'. And it's just like, when they have, then they drive like an old BMW or something like that. This is like, there's like little, I think terms I kind of microaggressions, but they're not really made out of intent to harm, but it's just, yeah. It's important to be aware. But at the same time, not to be overly aware to the point where you're just like, um, making it be it weird around people who are of that background."

Jaxsen

"Moving in with an entire cohort of people from Sydney and Melbourne. Honestly. Um, I think like I've been on campus for three years. Uh, this is my third year. Um, and I think still to this day, that's like the hardest part, I guess it's just like, I don't think I, well I had no concept of how different it was when I moved here. Um, and even now like so I'm an SR at [my residence] this year, um, and we have a really big first year cohort, um, because of like the whole COVID thing, they'll get like guaranteed entry. So we have a really big first-year cohort. Um, and majority of them, like 80 to 85% are from like the two major cities. Um, so it's just, yeah, it's a big difference of like experience and like schooling or just like life experience in general, I dunno, is sort of like this such a big disparity."

"I think again, like with [my scholarship] you end up meeting...other people in somewhat similar situations, I guess. And like, I think whether or not they're from Sydney or Melbourne or like, you know, rural Queensland or something like that, they're all like similar in mindset, I guess. So, and I think at least in first year, a lot, we had like 10 to 12 people doing the same sort of sciences for the first year. Um, and I think having them as like support was like probably the best thing that I could have had, I guess. Um, I don't, I'm, I'm lucky that like, you know, support on campus is also really good. Um, and like support from the actual like office of the scholarship is good. And I think the university support for rural students is getting better. Um, slowly, uh, I've done done a bit of work in a couple of the different things that like that support rural students and it's yeah, it's getting there. Um, but I, like, I recognize that I definitely would have had a lot harder time, especially in my first year if I was not on scholarship and on campus, which is, I guess not really the reality for many rural students."

"I think like in my first year I definitely tried to, I guess hide is maybe what I'd use. Um, but it was, it was more, I guess, like a point of embarrassment or something. Um, I didn't really know. Yeah. Like how to explain that, I guess, but now it's more like, I dunno. I like, yeah I identify with like coming from, you know, like rural [state] or whatever, but at the same time, it's also like hard for me to compare or not, I guess compare it, like, it's hard for me not to acknowledge that like I've definitely had a very like privileged experience at ANU compared to really anyone else from an actual, like from low SES background, I suppose. Um, I think my experience at ANU was very much been one of like, kind of similar to anyone else who, you know, comes from Sydney or Melbourne, I suppose. Um, so yeah. Yeah."

"I felt, at least for me, like, like my entire degree, I've been catching up as opposed to like, you know, starting at the same point, which I think like ANU kind of tends to market as like, 'oh, you know, like everyone starts at the same point', but I don't think that's true. Um, and like, irrespective of, if you do like the same syllabus or like the same year 11 and year 12 curriculum, the standard of education that like you can kind of see from Sydney or Melbourne or really like anywhere else is kind of just not on par I guess. "

"I just kind of wish that some people realize that they don't know what that's like, I guess in the same way that like, I don't know what's living in a built-up city is like, like it's, it's the same concept, I suppose. Um, but yeah, I don't know. Like I have one friend specifically from Sydney who like in first year was like really good at realizing that like he didn't understand what like that different upbringing was like and was like super receptive to that. And I think like that's probably one of the most appreciated things that like I've had."

"I think for me as well, like in my first year, I kind of felt guilty at any point where like some form of accommodation was made because I was from a low SES background. And I don't know if that's just kind of my nature or what, but like, I don't know. It kind of feels like I should be able to just like do it, like no matter what it is, like, you know, like chemistry was the exact same. Like I would like talk to the lecturer and he's like, 'oh, you know, like we can like go through stuff like together or whatever'. And I was, I don't want that kind of accommodation made just because I guess, I don't know... he's just trying to help anyone who doesn't understand. But I think like for me, at least it was always kind of in the back of my mind that like, you know, the reason that I couldn't do something or like understand something in class or anything like that was like, because I was from not Sydney or Melbourne, I guess. Um, and I think like that's a super like destructive way to think. Um, but I think it's like definitely something that's happened in my first year and like...I felt bad reaching out and asking for help because like, it seemed like everyone else had it together."

Joanne

"I was initially just going to go to UWA and then I dunno, I think I was talking to a friend and she was like, Oh, I'm going to Melbourne University because this is the best place to study, like what I want to do. And I, at this stage in year 12, I newly just discovered I wanted to do like

international relations and the UWA course was called political science and international relations. So I kind of just Googled best place to do political science, international relations and stumbled across the ANU and this like really cool, they had the like whole, um, the website, like degree builder. It was the easiest one that I use out of all the unis. And I felt like, 'Oh, I know what I need to do with this degree'... I get to do a bachelor's and a master's altogether, which would look really good on a CV having both and it's, you know, less time and also like less expensive in terms of HECS. So instead of doing like a four year degree, and then it's like another post-grad degree, it'll like fits together. So it means that I'm paying less overall. And I have another year in the workforce where that I would've missed out otherwise if that makes sense. So for me it was like, okay, this is double economically like suitable"

"I've been at [my residence] for the last three years. Um, when I first moved over, I came into [my residence] cause it was very much like the, um, boarding school environment that I was used to. And for me it was just a good way to like meet people and make friends where I wouldn't know anyone else. I didn't, also economically I couldn't, you know, the stress of finding a house and then paying rent and then getting furniture with people who I'd never met before. I was like, no, I'm not doing that. So I just went to [my residence] first and [my residence] that I'm at, um, I'm actually at [residential hall], and I guess one of the challenges I found is I was one of the only people who wasn't like from Sydney or Melbourne. And I was also one of the only people from a low socioeconomic, um, like group. I don't know if you know the [residential hall] reputation, but it's very much got a reputation of, you know, like North shore, upper upper school, um, private, privately schooled Sydney kids. And I was just not that at all. So it was kind of like, I felt like a bit of like a, like an imposter hiding, like everyone thought this is who I was, but in reality, no I'm living off Centrelink and stressing out about things like that. So that was like a challenge for me coming because when I came over, um, my, my parents are first generation migrants. Oh no, I'm the first generation migrants. Um, we migrated from [another country] when I was like five years old. Um, and so when I moved to university, I knew that they really couldn't support me and still support my two younger sisters at home. So it was kind of like I had to come over and find my own way. And that was challenging. Um, just like trying to navigate things, yeah. That was stressful to like economic side of it and also feeling like everyone else, you know, there's like the little things like I'd go shopping with friends and they'd be looking at like brands that are just so out of budget for me, I'd just like, well, a hundred dollars for pants. No, that's not how that works."

"at [my residential hall], where I like have been maybe a bit more open is, um, we have a diversity committee and I've been on the diversity committee for three years now. So every year of [my residence] so far, and we have like a, um, low SES sub committee and I've always been on that. And so it's good kind of talking about that sort of experience and that feeling with other people. Um, and that's like a little cluster that I've been more vocal and more like transparent in."

"I guess that's the challenging bit is sometimes it's confusing how the fees work. And like when I, in first year, when I looked at the, my little ISIS account and it said you may owe \$5,000, I was like 'No, what do you mean? I can't do that.' And I guess, yeah, that's just, that's a challenge that I've had. Um, other than that, probably just, I feel like I've been pretty good at it, but like finding balance between working, study and like having a social life sort of thing like that, that balance is always tricky because I have a, I have a part-time, you know, not a part-time job. I have a casual job and sometimes I'm just like, Oh, like I'm feeling stressed about my economic situation. I have to work all these hours and then I'll work a lot. And then I'll be like, 'Oh, I have no time to study'. And then I'll like not work for two weeks. And then it was just like this cycle of me trying to find the balance between like sustaining myself, but also actually doing the uni work."

"I just remember last year coming to this realization and just like going there was, I remember once I was like freaking out about, um, Centrelink payments or I got like an email, um, they changed my like payment amount or something. And I was like in, in a little tutorial room crying and one of the post-grad girls come, she was like, 'don't worry all the post-grads know what

you're feeling like we're all of Centrelink, because we're all over 22'. And I just, I had like found her, 'I've done this thing. You'd understand.' But yea, no, I guess in that way, there's like a little bit of a comradery with people who I've found to also be a low SES and also have that sort of, you know, like Centrelink experience. That's been kind of nice. Um, but it's mainly been with the post-grads."

"I get a lot of support, so this year I'm a residential advisor, but I've always gotten a lot of support from the admin at [my residential hall]... Like it, it it's always felt like I could, you know, talk to one of them also in my first year I had really good, um, residential advisors on my floor who I could talk to... which is kind of why I've gone for the position, because I feel like if that's where I've gotten support with my experience, I can give support with my experience to other people who are having the same experience sort of thing. Um, yeah. I also got a lot of support from my friends. Gen-, just like generally looking out for me and listening and stuff."

"I know that my parents are very much, they take the philosophy that money doesn't matter. So if I need, like, if I actually need money, they're so happy to like transfer some over. I guess part of me just feels guilty asking because in my head I'm like, like I can survive just fine. Um, I do get a lot of support from my dad sometimes just being an adult. Less now, than in first year, but I used to like, I'd call him crying and be like, 'help'."

"The student population, everyone kinda makes assumptions about people where they're from. And I think at ANU, it's not so much where you're from outside of uni, but where you're from, at least for me and my experience, um, what [residential hall] you're from. So for me, it was very, it was always very isolating, kinda upsetting when people would ask me where I'm from, I'd say [my residential hall], and I know already in their head, they've got like this list of stereotypes, like, 'Oh, like private school, you know, daddy's credit card'. And I'm like, 'no, no, no, no, no, no, very much the opposite of that'. And it was just kind of like, it upset me a bit that people were like assuming this about me and not knowing that I have a completely different experience and kind of like lumping me in with a stereotype. I guess there was like an instance where, an interhall like dance committee oh no, dance competition, um, it was like one of the events and the MC made a joke about [my residential hall] being like, being "so diverse". And like, I just remember coming back and feeling like, like, 'am I not diverse, am I not just not being seen? Do I need, do I not even exist in the eyes of the student body?' And it was just kinda not, not fun."

"I kind of wish people knew that there are some students who are literally like surviving on the scholarship and they've like, it always feels to me, at least in my experience, I might be limited to like, you know, my perspective on my mindset, but like the work, the work that people have to have done as like, um, students graduating from a public school to then get a scholarship, gets the ATAR to come to university like that work, I know for me, that was essentially all done by myself. I know, um, at my school, my average mark was much higher than the other people at school. And that was because, you know, for me, at least I felt like I would be doing the extra study to get the extra steps to get to this ultra competitive university. Um, I didn't, it felt because it was also like a regional school as well. I felt like I didn't have any like extra curricular support. Like I had really supportive teachers who are really, really good. Um, but it kind of felt like lots of the work that I did, I did by myself without really extra resources that I imagined private schools to get. I have no experience in private schools. So it's kind of just like what I like stereotypes that I've heard and kind of things that I've heard. Um, but yeah, like that sort of feeling that some people have just had to, you know, jump one or two extra hurdles to get to the same level where other students are. That was kinda like something I wish people kind of maybe not knew, but just kept in the back of their mind."

"I'm definitely proud of like where I'm at. I'm very proud of like the scores I'm getting. Um, and I know that they like reflect the work that I put in. And I guess, like just growing up, maybe it's just me just growing up in a small country town, there is very much like tall poppy syndrome and that experience of tall poppy syndrome I've had throughout my entire schooling experience. It's

just kinda, I don't know, conditioned me to, you know, like we'll just celebrate, but we'll celebrate on the inside. We won't tell anyone.”

“I guess it just, I dunno, um, if it's, again like a migrant thing where, you know, the feeling that you have to be humble, um, but like, it feels very gloaty to be like, 'Oh, yes, I got, you know, this ATAR at a pri- like public school, words not working for me there, at a public school, you know, um, and I won this scholarship and this scholarship, and that's how I can afford to be here.' Like saying all those things, not only feels very gloaty like, 'look at me, I'm so great.' But it also feels like you have to recognize, 'Oh, I come from, you know, a lower socioeconomic class, like I'm, you know, there's like an admission, then I've come from a different place. And because I'm different, you know, maybe you'll treat me differently'.”

Kai

“I think I, I just felt as though I kind of needed to go to university, um, uh, for me a lot of it was just kinda like proving that I can go to university...And I wanted something that seemed a little bit more employable than, um, a generic arts degree or was more named, so it's why the ANU appeal to me, it had very specific degrees, um, they were often one of a kind. Um, and it, it seemed a little bit more reliable than doing an arts majoring in politics or an arts majoring in policy. Um, so just having a bachelor of policy or bachelor of political science just sounded a little bit more, um, I guess, stable, um, but especially to my younger brain.”

“Um, and this year I've done a few cert fours in like youth work, um, community development and alcohol and other drug treatment, um, which I never thought would be the path that I went down. Um, but having come here and being removed from my, I guess my, um, my place back home, um, I kind of felt more of a, in weirdly enough more of a connection to the people that I grew up with back home. And, um, you kind of see a lot of the issues that they struggled with and wanted to get those techniques to try and help them. So, um, at least for the next few years, I wouldn't mind working in community development and youth work, particularly in like rezzy care and working with young people at risk, um, and definitely segwaying away from the, the politics stuff. “

“I got, um, applied for like an international program with an organization... when we all kind of got added to a collective group chat to start discussing the trip, everyone was talking about their future university plans. And, um, perhaps nine out of 16 of them were planning on attending the ANU. Um, and they were all from Sydney and Melbourne. Um, and one in particular, he was from Wollongong. Um, he wanted to study political science and he told me about the degree. Um, and I, me and my friends back at school, um, we were just kind of making fun of them a little bit, taking the piss out of them, um, because we felt that we're kind of being a little bit up themselves going to like the 'national university'. Um, and then we decided to actually go on the degree page and look through the courses and programs, um, and it sounded really interesting. Um, and we were just like, 'wow. Okay. Yup. All right. Fair enough.' So, um, so yeah, and then, uh, out of the two of us, um, I ended up deciding to pursue it just on a whim. I think I put an application in the day before, um, uh, applications closed. I think I used like a weeks of my wages, um, from working in a cinema and put like the UAC application in. I applied through UAC cause I was the only way I could figure out how, um, cause for context SA has a very insular university admissions program. You only get access to the three universities through the state paid, um, SATAC service. So, um, I didn't actually realize you could apply for interstate universities into I started looking into it. Um, so yeah, paid the \$70 or so UAC fee, um, and then applied to the ANU and then when my results came out, um, got an offer.”

“I applied for the South Australian ones because, um, we essentially had our SATAC fee that was like a part of our program. So we would go into school, um, and there would be a dedicated kind of lesson for, um, sorting out what you wanted to do after uni, after school, sorry. Um, and so all the teachers at my school anyway, all they really knew was they had the booklets from SATAC.”

“My mum, uh, my mum, single mum, uh, had an aneurysm... She had no, um, had a bit of a long term issues, but like none that were overly really pressing for her. Um, and yeah, she was really encouraging, um, and said that I should definitely keep considering it and don't make ch-, don't change my plans because of her, which was really great. Um, all my, my family was less, so they thought I wasn't ready. My granddad thought I wasn't ready and told my mum that I shouldn't be going. Um, but she didn't really tell me that she just kinda like, let me do my own thing.”

“I think, um, because I was like a relatively, um, high high-performing student at high school, I really enjoyed politics. That was what the ANU was known for. Um, it was, I really liked some of the people that I'd already met that were coming here. I kind of assumed that everyone, naively so, would be very similar to me, um, despite our differences. Uh, but then I realized I couldn't really be further from the truth. And I, I think, um, the big thing was I, at that time, I think I didn't realize that people could be really nice, but also, um, weren't great people, if that makes sense. I think I was used to people if they weren't great people, they just weren't great people to your face.”

“Um, and I found that really, really difficult, but yeah no, that social aspect has, uh, has been and continues to be just a massive thing. Um, just a lot of disconnect, a lot of people not really understanding or sharing interests...there's a lot of that sort of experiential, uh, disconnect. Um, and then another one was career opportunities and lifestyles. Um, my mom has been in retail for her entire working career. Um, a lot of it because, um, uh, we lost my dad when I was only 11 months old, so, uh, in a tragic accident. So, um, she kind of had to make this concessions and she abandoned, um, her study... and she just kind of had to focus on, uh, making ends meet, so to speak, to, to really make sure I was okay and try to make sure there's food on the table, um, which she did an excellent job of, but it meant that she really hampered her own sort of career development... So I think when I came here and I met a lot of students whose parents were, um, lawyers, or they were, uh, executive directors of companies or, um, they were diplomats working as ex-pats overseas, or they went to schools, international schools in China, which is quite a common one and their parents work extensively there. Um, it was just a whole different lifestyle really.”

“I don't think I was, um, I was aware of wealth disparity being interested in politics, but not to the extent that actually exists. I think, um, when you compare, uh, I guess the type of schools that are in my area to the type of schools that a lot of my, even some of my close friends here went to so very big, um, not a culture shock, but my own sort of socioeconomic shock, so to speak.”

“it actually probably took up, um, 12 months before I started to feel like I was making a, a solid group of friends inside my residence, um, that weren't just acquaintances or a friendly face. Um, but were actual authentic friends. So yeah, I've got more of a group now. Um, but we've all kind of got our, had our own sort of struggles and can relate on very different areas, um, but largely very similar interests, which is kind of what gets us through as most friendships do.”

“I think it, I think for the first few years, I think it was to the point where it was very much a part of, kind of my core conceptualization of myself, which, um, I found both, uh, empowering in so far as I was in a very small minority at the ANU, but also really, really saddening and disempowering in so far as, um, it kind of inspired a lot of, uh, lack of confidence, so to speak, in my future prospects. So it was kind of like a catch 22. Like it really made me feel valued as a member of the ANU community and I kind of wanted there to be more people like me. Um, and so I was really happy when I found them, but broadly speaking, I was always very kind of, um, uh, demoralized as a result of it. “

“I think I was kind of annoyed because I just wanted to understanding from people and whenever I spoke to them, all I would get was like a lot of sympathy. Um, which like is fine in small doses, but like, I, I, this is kind of how I grew up and it's who I am. So like sympathy for who I am as a person is like really weird to me and doesn't actually connect with what I'm trying to say. Um, most of the time, I just want understanding, um, if you would kind of empathize with my

frustration, not sympathize with my upbringing, like I didn't have any qualms about my upbringing. I wouldn't change it for the world.”

“I think like, you know, being on Centrelink, being at that highest rate, um, not really having that university kind of knowledge and support, um, not really having someone I can talk to about my assignments or my research or whatever I'm working on. Um, the big thing thing for me was I'm starting to work in a lot of careers where my pay rate is higher than what my mom gets. Um, almost two fold at this point, which is, um, a lot of things I have to kind of reconcile with myself and then, kind of be like, accept that's kind of the reality of where I'm going in my career. “

“I do love it and I wouldn't trade it for the world. I got a lot of experience in growth out of it growth far beyond my years, if I, if I were to compare it to what I would've gotten at home. Um, but it is really, really hard and really draining as well. Um, I think, uh, the first year I did feel a lot of pressure to class pass, so to speak. I, um, spent a lot of money on clothes that I really shouldn't have. Um, I spent a lot of money on, on activities that I didn't really care for just so I could fit in socially. I spent a lot of my, what little disposable income I had on things that really didn't matter in the long term. And if you were to like, the clothes is such a weird thing, like it's such a small thing. Um, but something that I really attach on to just because like, I can look at my, like my wardrobe now, and I know that there is pretty much not a single piece of clothing that I bought from that, from that like year I was at uni really that I actually am still kind of wearing, um, or even have, I think I've donated most of it.”

“it's not different, it's just like, we've just had a bit of a rougher experience. Like the kids I went to school with were rougher, like they were, they'd been through their own, like arguably far worse circumstances than what I went through. And mine were pretty shitty. Like I think people just don't have a lot of patience, I think for, um, for people with my background and they kind of assume the worst.”

“why can't people see or understand or make that effort to see who I am, but yeah, you know, it, I think if that's the one thing that if I could change and, you know, in a heartbeat and just kind of snap my fingers and have people understand is that like, um, everyone's willing to understand everyone's background as different, but I think people forget that it continues to shape you, um, well into adulthood.”

“none of my teachers knew about the ANU or their programs or how they worked or, uh, any supports I could get. And when they found out I was going, they were just kind of, um, they were really shocked and just assumed I was gonna be a politician. So like, I think like a lot of that outreach is a big thing. I think, predominately doing outreach to, um, out of Metro and regional public schools, it would be amazing. I know it's not, they don't always have the resources to engage, but, um, as the national uni, I would love to see that becoming more of a predominant a priority and making that something that you can do. Um, cause a lot of us, even in the lower income schools, still want, um, are still aiming for ATARs above the 90, which for most degrees at the ANU is more than enough.”

Kiara

“I chose this degree program and ANU more specifically, I suppose, because it's such a great program that has research opportunities embedded into the degree. And I was really interested in pursuing a career in research and, um, ANU is known for its really good work in the research, um, the medical research field and epidemiology... I think ultimately I really wanna go into research, so becoming a career researcher, working in the lab”

“it wasn't, I think necessarily like the uni that sort of drew me in, but rather the social circumstances I was trying to escape. So I come from a very difficult home life and you know, I just, all I'd known was like that very difficult home life, um, living in [my hometown] and in a way, going to college or being able to move out, um, was a way to sort of escape it. And from doing summer camps at ANU, I remember feeling like, like... remembering how happy I felt to be

somewhere where I was gonna be fed and I'd get a quiet night's sleep... like I could just focus on work. So it was tricky because in a way it was almost a selfish decision. Like I was escaping, like, a difficult home life and just, in a way, wanted to focus on myself or like escape...sort of the, um, I dunno how you say the lack of stability that um, I'd come from. So I think that's why I ended up choosing ANU, but I didn't think it was gonna happen when I was in high school. So I didn't think it was gonna be a realistic option to come here. “

“So at one point in year 12, I been hospitalized 'cause I was so malnourished from neglect and difficult things at home that like I literally passed out at school. So I was on a free meal program at school for a while. So it was really, really difficult and in a way, because my brother and my dad struggled with mental health issues and various other things, I was like almost like the stable figure in the house. So I had work, I had an income and it was sort of a choice between staying home and taking care of my dad, who's like a much older parent.. like he turned 72 this year, or like sort of leaving him behind and then going off to uni to focus on myself, like I could send back money and I do send back money, but I hear this from a lot of other, um, students around here at, um, ANU from my background as well. That there's almost like that guilt because you feel you should have stayed behind to almost like take care of them physically, you know, keep their house clean and do things like that. So in a way I feel like a very rich parent who's trying to buy their kids love 'cause um, you know, I send money back, pay for house maid pay for stuff like that to sort of make up for the fact that I can't physically be back at home. So I think that's why I only see it as like a selfish decision. So it was like a hard choice to make, um, at the end of year 12.”

“It was amazing like, you know, ANU offers this sort of stability that just wasn't like there back at home. Um, that said first year was really difficult just because it was a huge cultural shock in a way, like I'd come from that sort of hell hole and then I was in a place where like, from my perspective, literally no one knew what it was like growing up like that. And that's fine. Like that's, that's okay. That's the nature of ANU, I guess. Um, but I think it was hard because I happened to go to a college or happened to have been drawn into circles that were particularly or unusually homogenous. So people were very wealthy, largely white, and that was like really different from my suburb and like my high school. Um, and it was also the attitudes that these people had towards wealth and sort of inequality. “

“I think the most challenging thing about ANU was the perception that it valued people who'd come from very wealthy and largely white backgrounds. So it was hard feeling like...like I was in a space that didn't want me because I was somehow seen as inferior, or less than, and I'm not sure if this comes from, you know, the university at large or if it was just a product of the circles, like the, you know, student circles that I was in. So I had, um, I'd applied for some scholarship and I remember it was a very difficult experience 'cause in the scholarship, like it was the first time I was made aware of my class because they were asking questions like, ‘oh, what do your parents do for Australia?’ And I remember being made to feel really embarrassed 'cause my mom was a housemaid or that, like, I had a really ratty jumper and only sneakers and that was my best formal wear. And like, you know, I'd never been aware of that stuff until it was pointed out to me in that interview and, you know, that was fine. Like I don't mind like not getting certain scholarships, like there were always other back-ups and there was always Centrelink. Um, but then it was when I sort of met people who did get those scholarships and I started to notice pattern, and other people were noticing a pattern, and the fact that people linked to the scholarship, you know, appeared to get all these unusual, almost undue advantages that I think the perception amongst people like me or at least my friends and the circles I ran in was that we weren't valued in a way - like there was something inherently wrong with us that meant we weren't deserving of substantial financial aid. And I remember when I brought up those feelings with like my then terrible, terrible boyfriend at the time, it was just sort of like, it was like, well, yeah, you don't deserve those scholarships. Like you don't speak a certain way or you don't wear the right clothes or conduct yourself in a certain way that's deserving of like success I guess. But it seemed that that sort of conduct or that way of speaking with was largely associated with

coming from a very wealthy and very privileged and educated background. So I think that's what the huge shock was when I first came to ANU, like the perception that things like overcoming hardship weren't valued, but then this could just be me being naive, you know? "

"He was like a caricature of like a terrible person, if that makes sense. So he said to me that I was pov trash... And you wouldn't think anyone would like even think that, you know, and that just like hit like a brick, you know, I didn't know what else to say. And it was stuff like, 'oh, like, you know, you only got your scholarship or whatever, 'cause you're a girl and you know, women in STEM is good optics or you played the race card or you played the poor card'. Um, and so I like, I would get that a lot... So it was a very unusual sort of entitlement that I'd never encountered before...that was a big shock, like meeting people who like were like...you know, explicitly disgusted by my circumstances and where I'd come from and this terrible, terrible ex partner, he ended up visiting my house in [my hometown] and used words, like disgusting, and pathetic. And he made my dad cry 'cause my dad was like, so embarrassed, like just sort of have this person, um, you know, tell us that we were disgusting. And I think that's why it was really difficult cause he had this scholarship and because of this scholarship people were like, 'oh my God, he must be amazing...He must be a great person'. So I was really stuck in this really terrible relationship. And he was like so awful to me, um, for such a long time, because I thought there was something wrong with me 'cause it was like, 'oh the university celebrates them'. Like other people celebrate them like there must be an issue with me. So I think that's how I ended up with maybe these unfounded feelings of like not being valued by the institution, if that makes sense. And I don't, you know, need to be put on a pedestal. It was just like there needs...like..it's really difficult to feel... When you're like systematically sort of less valued if that makes sense. So I think that was um, the big shock, I guess, 'cause like I come from a school where you get the message, you know, no matter how hard...like... If you work hard, you can probably get somewhere. And then like when I left that interview for that scholarship and when you know, The other applicants who didn't get it also left, we all noticed that we were all the people of color and we were all the people from low-SES backgrounds and we just sort of realized like there was literally nothing we could ever do to like get a scholarship of that kind simply just because you can't like, you know, get the right mannerisms or think in the same way from the backgrounds that we come from. So I think that was a shock. It was like almost an attack on like my identity and value as a person."

"I think once I started to get involved, like as a research assistant was when I started to feel better about myself, 'cause I suspect the faculty is a lot more diverse than the student cohort, so there are more diverse opinions. And what I notice is that faculty are more likely to respond or be aware of equity issues or like have an appreciation for diversity, um, which is very different from students who I think can get very uncomfortable or can be very apathetic."

"I think in the lab and when I first like started applying for scholarships and opportunities, I would definitely hide it because there's that perception that if you come from, you know, a higher class background and you can talk about things like a Tolstoy or Latin, you come off as more cultured and intellectual. So think at the start I felt really ashamed and that was just a product of being with that terrible person who made me feel ashamed and told me I should be ashamed. Um, and that also that interview experience, cause I thought the reason why I didn't get those things or the reason why I wasn't accepted was because I came off as uncouth or uncultured. So I think at the start, I definitely, you know, tried to put on this persona of having like more cultured background. I think that's why I have a slight accent as well..that's like slightly, I don't know, continental and ambiguous. Um, because you feel have to compensate and sort of play down aspects such as like your race or your wealth to come off as worthy and capable in a way. Cause you don't wanna talk about how you might struggle financially, 'cause you could be seen as a liability. It's like, 'oh, if Kiara can't afford to come this conference, like we won't take her on' or 'if Kiara will need to work during Honours, we won't take her on'. So you need to...I feel like I have to downplay the fact that like I have to do extra work or something to get by if that makes sense."

“At one point I was earning more from scholarship money than my dad earned in income”

“I think it started to change when I met people from halls like B&G, which are on the cheaper end of the scale so I think they attract, um, people from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. So it was when I sort of met those people, um, who were diverse in a lot of ways, you know, socioeconomically, culturally and linguistically, that I started to feel more at home cause it was more similar to where I'd come from. And there were more points of commonality between me and them and they were also more receptive to conversations about like... Like...we were all sort of similar in that we felt a bit alienated from the uni, um, in terms of what we looked like and where we'd come from. So I think that was really validating cause it was like, I thought I was like the only one, you know, here. I hadn't met anyone... I'd only met one other person at my [residential hall] who was on Centrelink. And so it was validating to realise I wasn't an absolute minority here at the university.”

“And then I think the second thing was meeting, um, or getting to know one of the staff members at my [residential hall]. So I dunno if you know, [this academic], um, absolute legend, like love him to bits so when I first, um, talked to him and got to know him and then he was like, 'No, like you're right. Like, you know, things shouldn't be like that. That's not fair. That was not okay for that person to say to you' - that was also validating. So I think it was all about regaining what my idea of the world is and how it should work, which helped. Cause I think a part of feeling disenfranchised is that you feel that the way you think is wrong. So meeting someone who could tell me, no, I like the way you think...you're thinking the right way, that really helped.”

“I had this really wonderful mentor. Like I didn't talk to her, you know, about the stuff I've been through, but having like a senior academic or professor like tell you that they want you like in their lab, [that] they think you're great...they think you're smart or whatever. Um, was also really validating cause then I felt that maybe I do belong here at ANU. Maybe I can contribute in some way or if there is some value, like to me being here, like I don't need to be, you know, a university medalist or like a star student, but I wanna feel like I'm wanted here. If that makes sense. Like me being here, isn't sort of, you know, like something they do just to get more money, but more like they have faith in me and that I can contribute to science to contribute to, whatever, to advance knowledge or make the world a bit of a better place.”

“But here at ANU, I think my identity is someone from a minority background in that I'm relatively low-SES, I'm from an ethnically diverse background. I don't come from North Shore Sydney. So I think my identity here, unfortunately, I think is everything that I'm not, which is not white enough, not rich enough, not cultured, not smart enough. So it's a negative identity, but I'm really hoping that it changes or it's different, like when I graduate and I think the identity I have amongst students is more negative ones. So [I am a part of] the 'have nots', um, as opposed to the identity that I have when I'm working in the faculty or when I'm working in research, which is just, you know, an undergrad student who's really interested in research and learning. “

Luca

“I needed to move 90 minutes away from home so that I qualified for Centrelink. So I think I'd still would've qualified if I moved to Sydney, but that was obviously something that, um, I had to think about as well.”

“I lived off campus for the first six months. Um, which the reason why I didn't apply for on campus is because I think I sort of didn't think that I could afford it with my Centrelink because like my rates got approved for when I was living off campus..So the, my CentreLink covered my entire rent, but then I decided that I was going to move on campus after that semester because it was like, honestly, like probably one of the worst parts of my life because of like the pandemic and like just had moved out of home and like a lot of, a lot of things happened. Um, and then I like was sort of like 'well I need to move on campus because I know I need to like be able to make friends and stuff'.”

“When I moved to ANU, I had a big culture shock, um, about how wealthy Canberra is not only the university, but the, just the city itself, but even at the university, like it's obviously more of a, um, privileged university compared to other, like USyd, or Uni of Wollongong, or maybe not more privileged, but like I guess because they're bigger universities they have more like lower socioeconomic students as well. And so I found when I moved to [my residential hall]...it was the first time that I met other people, other students on Centrelink, which I think has also been helpful.”

“That like that sort of like, um, transition period where I didn't really, uh, like I didn't have friends, but I just like, didn't like, um, was still learning to cope with like a difference in like socioeconomic position, because I think that, um, like a lot of my friends were like talking about like, 'oh, like I wish I got youth allowance' or like 'I wish I did this' or like whatever. I was sort of like a bit like, well, yeah, I understand what you're saying and that like, you want to be, like you see it as like being financially independent from your parents, but also like, I mean, I'm quite lucky cause my parents are quite supportive, but I know a lot of my friends who get CentreLink and then also just pay for all of the other stuff. So they really are just supporting themselves. Um, and I just like sort of, I don't know that kind of thing kind of really bugged me and try to find people who understood that was difficult at first. Um, so I think there's not really space for people to find those people and it can be quite isolating.”

“I think living off campus was really hard cause I lived in Gungahlin as well. So it was quite far away and I didn't really, I, I think when I moved out just kind of was like, I need to find somewhere and like, you know, um, so it's quite like a bit of a commute to come into the city and then study and all of that sort of thing. So, and there was a couple of things and yeah. And definitely last year was hard because of the pan-, like I think it would have been a lot different if the pandemic didn't hit, but like, because of the pandemic, I got quite depressed and like, like I stayed here and um, also when I moved here, I got a job and was working like 30 hours a week and while also trying to make friends and um, you know, do well in uni and I just sort of got so stressed and like got quite sick for two weeks actually, because I just like was sort of overworking myself, trying to do everything and settle in. Because I think like that's something that's like unique to lower SES students is that, you know, a job is like a very important thing for them when they move out because they need to like make up the money that they might've lost from having to move. Um, and so like, you know, when I found my job, even though 30 hours was like too much for me, I still was doing it to try and keep that job. And then that sort of like affected everywhere else in my life. “

“I still am seeing a psychologist. Um, and I'd say that's the main thing is just like psychologist. And also like just the fact that my lifestyle has changed because I've moved on campus. So I think the biggest thing is less, so what was happening in my life and that kind of thing, but more so my environment, like, um, the fact that I have sort of access to community and access to, uh, sort of that social side of things, which like is helpful for my wellbeing. Um, probably more so than a psychologist. Like the psychologist definitely helps me, but that was more like probably just like, yeah. Um, last year when I was living off campus that that helped rather than now, which is just sort of like, it's more of a, just like an extra thing that I can sometimes talk about. And now it's not even about those issues that I was having last year it's sort of more of like a self, like bettering thing to talk about other issues of my life that are like not really attached to that, if you're not like sexuality and gender and that kind of thing. “

“I think definitely one, like definitely having welfare is obviously a big thing. Like I feel very lucky that in Australia we have access to like, um, youth allowance when we want to study. Um, I also think that something that a lot of other low SES students don't have is that like my parents are, um, pretty well off for where they are, if you know what I mean like they're, well, like I just more so that they are very supportive of me and they've like sacrificed a lot to help me get here. So like, like I know that if I ever need money, that my parents will help me in that sort of thing.”

"I would say that I don't identify as low SES, particularly. I would say that I identify as like low and middle class or like mobile middle-class whatever you want to call it. Because like, as I said, my parents aren't like terribly, you know, in a terrible financial position or anything like that...Um, but in saying that, like, it's a bit of an interesting thing because there's so little working class or like low SES students on campus that sort of changed my perception of my wealth. I think moving to Can- like moving to ANU, um, because I'm like, sort of, so, so much less wealthy than other students. I sort of have sort of like lent into that identity a bit more because I think it's important to have those discussions with people. Cause there's not that many people that I know of, like with like, not, um, besides perhaps at B&G or off campus, because no one that I know of like with Centrelink or, or working class status. I don't know, I'm sure there's a lot of students who never have contact with anyone at uni who is essentially like poorer."

"I mean, that's the thing, like I obviously spend, I am, I think, um, compared to other people, I'm definitely, uh, I spend my money and don't really save it. Um, so I definitely do like go out, but I guess I'm a bit more like cautious of money than friends that I know when I do go out. So like when I go out, I might try to drink beforehand, um, or like, uh, you know, that sort of thing so that I'm not spending like, like I know friends who will just like easily spend 50 or a hundred dollars, like when they're on a night out, which I just don't do. And I wouldn't go out on a Saturday cause I just don't, um, couldn't sort of like rationalize paying entry into a club. So I only go out on Thursday obviously because that's when everything's, um, free entry. Um, and then I do use most of my money."

"for instance, right now I'm like, I have a couple of textbooks, which I'm like, I'm just going to go without those cause I actually don't like, like again, it's like a rationalizing the amount of money to pay for that, but I'm like, it's just not worth having the financial burden of like paying that \$150."

Max

"Um, unfortunately like when I actually moved down, like, um, my dad was actually supposed to help me move down, unfortunately likes to get his, um, cause basically, cause he's a carrier worker. Like he was called to work like the very last minute before I had to like, like my contract, like date started. So like I didn't have anyone to move me in, which was kind of sad."

"I guess like now if I'm looking back at first year, I think it was just more of just like, you know, I guess like financial, like, like I just think like, like, like finding a job and, you know, like having enough money to pay rent and like, I guess trying to balance that like experience that you want to have in first year being able to go like go out and, you know, have a fun time whilst like being able to like have enough money for food and rent and you know, and I dunno, like other essentials."

"I think one of the, one of the first things I missed out on was like, what was it? It was basically, it was [my residential hall] commencement. And, um, so what had happened was I hadn't received my tax file number for CenterLink and my equity, like scholarship didn't actually come through yet at that point. And so I had like \$200 to my name and basically like everyone was like going, like going to this ball and having fun. And I just had to sit in my room. I was like, 'oh, this is really sad'."

"I think like another thing that I found really difficult was just asking for help. You know, I think I, you know, being in a new city, not really knowing many people and like not having that like connection, I guess, to like, you know, because I didn't obviously like in my first year, I didn't really feel comfortable going up to my tutor being like, 'Hey, like what do I do here?' Or like, you know, doing that kind of stuff. Cause I guess there wasn't that trust yet."

"I was given like an equity scholarship in my first year that like really helped. Um, I wish that kind of continued longer in my degree, but like, um, like that was a really good thing, I guess in my first year. Cause I didn't have to completely worry about like, I guess when the money came

through, like I didn't have to completely worry about like not having a job just yet. Um, I guess, and I think it was just something like the networks I've been like making, I think it was like, like in first year, like just like making friends”

“I feel like a little more proud just to say like, oh, like I'm from like low-SES. Yeah. It's like, I managed to like do this, you know, with like, you know, and like not having the access to like all the creatures and comforts of people who come from more privileged backgrounds like have received. And so like, yeah, I'm very open about it. Like I think it's important to be open about not it just cause like the visibility is extremely important... Cause I think, I think it's the most powerful thing you could do if you're coming to like a university like this.”

“I think I just want people from like ANU to remember like, um, like everyone's, like check what kind of privileges they have, like I know I have privileges and that kind of thing as well. So I think it's just important that people kind of are able to remember, like where did they come from? And like, you know, I think it's important to, I guess, have that sense of empathy and like knowing people's stories as well before you meet them. I think that's a really clear thing and not really judging a book by its cover and just being really open.”

Oscar

“I knew someone from high school, um, and I was studying at [another] university at the same time as they were, and they, uh, knew about my home situation and asked me if I, if I, if I would like to come live with them for six months in Canberra, um... you know, rent free, which is very generous of them. So I took them up on that offer and I transferred”

“I think that in general, the main obstacle to people from less from low SES backgrounds is getting here.”

“I think the major thing is, is that there's a huge culture clash with um, other peo-, your peers basically the other students. Like they seem a lot of other people just simply have completely different life experiences to you. And it, it, it very much shapes the way they approach everything and it can make, it can make, um, you know, uh, university quite a lonely and alienating experience. Not that I think that's the fault of the university. It's just the nature of a university in Canberra.”

“I have some good friends and I don't feel alienated around them, but generally when I'm interacting with people from the wider cohort, um, it's pretty steady in terms of yeah, just a huge gulf, I think.”

“I think with a lot of these things, it's very difficult for people to genuinely engage with what this stuff can kind of mean. Like, I think most people haven't understand, like obviously people can comprehend on the superficial level that if your parents have less money than you had less stuff as a child, but I don't think they can comprehend all the ways that flows into your life in terms of your teachers at school are just less supportive of you. Um, you, you do have to, to, to, to, to, I had to go without, go without meals on occasion, and it shapes the way that you see the world intensely. And, you know, um, my, my, my father was very rarely around because he was pretty much relentlessly working night shift work. So he's just not really a presence in my childhood, except when he's not in a good mood, because he's working night shift. There are all these, these, these dimensions. And I don't know, there's, there's, there's generally a pretty simplistic can-, and somewhat condescending conception of, of, of, of, of what all this stuff means and how it, how it might affect people.”

“I have a very close friend, um, that has mostly meant, been the difference between semesters where I really haven't been engaging in my studies at all and semesters where I've really been able to involve myself in works. So I would say that I think how, I think the kind of friendships people want are an individual thing, but for me, having a very close, uh, friendship has, has really it's the difference between just being at the university and actual deep engagement.”

“Ideally you would want that housing to be going to students who would at least be close to qualifying for social housing, but that's not reality of it. So living with people like it's, it's bad enough to be in tutorials with people who are clueless about their social status, but living with them is another matter entirely.”

“There were basics that I, I went out like, uh, I, as I said, I went, there at times as a child, I went without meals. My parents, my parents would rarely take me to the doctor. Uh, I used to have to wear my school uniform on weekends cause I didn't really have any other clothes now this, I mean, I think if, if, if things had turned out differently, if, if one of my parents hadn't been very ill, I might not be in the same position. So I guess it is, it is difficult. Like it, what I'm trying to say is I wasn't born into generational poverty, I guess you could say that. Yeah, I can, I can definitely remember there, there would be comparisons with what my peers had and it was generally nice. And, um, even though these of these basic things were things that my parents theoretically could have afforded, they either weren't present or would even want to assign money to them.”

Rebecca

“I'm mature age student, um, I, it was something that I was actually just interested in generally.”

“I, um, so it was a combination of that plus I'm now 43 and it's really, really hard to go from being a professional to suddenly being a first year undergraduate student. Um, and I really struggled with just like, I, I wanna learn stuff, but I don't wanna be assessed. Um, I don't wanna have to jump through all the hoops of assessment. Um, I didn't feel like my, I was in a head space where I could write an essay. I haven't written one for like 13 years and they kind of freaked me out.”

“I really needed the encouragement of a really good lecturer. Someone that I could believe in and feel inspired by and supported by and trust that I was in good hands and that I wasn't just being, you know, the bread and butter of the universities, the, the money they get from undergraduate students and graduate students. I just didn't wanna feel used.”

“I tried, um, I tried to join Griffin Hall, um, but I didn't, I was broke, um, because of the personal circumstances I went through, I had to stop work. I then ended up with some trauma and I ended up, um, on a disability support pension for the first time ever. Um, and I just had no money, no disposable income. So I couldn't even afford the two, it was \$200? I can't remember what it was to join Griffin Hall. I think it was \$200. I couldn't afford it... I joined Facebook groups like the there's a few different Facebook groups. What's the ANUSA one or the New to ANU one? Um, and I tried to find out, uh there is a mature aged student's one actually. I joined that and there's, there's like no activity on it. There's just nothing happening. Um, so I, out of desperation, started a, um, put a notice up to start like a swimming group that would meet once a week at Club Lime and go for a swim together and then have a chat or a coffee or something for mature aged students. And I did have one person join who was lovely, but then she kind of went, once lockdown happened and mid-semester break happened and everything, she kind of fell out of touch. And I had another two join, but they were kind of doing their own thing and not really into the social aspect.”

“Even though we are, you know, first years and we are just meat in the grinder, I, I wanted somebody who actually inspired me. Um, yeah, I think it, it was really the face to face stuff, feeling really engaged, um, and not lost. Like I just felt completely lost on campus. I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere.”

“Mostly it's just been, um, my own kind of drive to learn and to be part of a community, I guess.”

“I just kind of try to fit in with what I'm wearing and, and yeah, being able to buy a coffee if I can or that kind of thing. I don't think people are necessarily compassionate or kind around, um, um, people who can't, you know, afford things like parking or coffee”

“I think the Nest Program was awesome, but I needed to go for the whole semester and probably the whole year. And that was a really awesome way of getting people to relax around

each other. Plus on top of that, they were learning about healthy eating plus on top of that, and the most important part was they were actually cooking together and then they should have been, we should have been sitting down and eating together, cuz that immediately gives you the social support, you're getting a meal, it feels really welcoming. It's kind of, it feels a bit like a family that would've been really good. “

“I feel like they, because the ANU has such a good reputation, it's kind of like they ignore the people who have disadvantage and they just kind of focus on the people who are rich and, um, have, you know, exceeded in whatever course they're doing. And it's all about reputation for ANU.”

“I feel a bit like they don't care about people who have struggled, um, who might be, you know, not a brilliant young mind. Um, I feel like I wish that they knew the potential that I had if I had enough, if they cared.”

“I haven't been able to read, um, haven't been able to keep up with any of the week's lectures, cuz there was set readings from the textbook each week. Um, I I've never come across this. And then they were saying, I think it was the lecture who said to me, 'yeah, ANU's policy is that they don't have to provide textbooks in the library for students'. Um, I'm like I've never, ever in my entire academic experience come across that before. How could one of the richest universities in Australia do that? I mean, we're talking about a couple of textbooks in the library. Um, I couldn't even get a copy of it online because I had to give my credit card details described, um, to be able to access it and I couldn't afford that. Um, so yeah, that, stuff like that just makes me you incredibly aware that they don't give a shit.”

“I wanna feel kind of welcomed as a new student and have a sense of belonging and I couldn't get a ticket to go to my own Commencement Ceremony. I couldn't even get into Market Day. I turned up to go and couldn't even get in.”

“There were really good things too. Like, um, my car tire burst, uh, it was during first semester and I had, I had to spend my last \$300 on joining the NRMA so they could come and <affirmative> basically, you know, rescue me from the side of the road. Um, I couldn't afford to replace the tire. Um, but I was able to apply for an emergency grant and that really saved me, that allowed me to get new tires. And I, I was in a really, I was in poo before that. Um, and I felt kind of bad because I ended up withdrawing from the units that I got that, um, that help from them, but I was also very grateful for it. Uh, yeah. And I also got, I think I got a, a grocery voucher at one point too, which was really good.”

“I just, I feel for it's, it's awful to feel like this and it feels really a lot lonely to be the only one complaining about this stuff. And I, this is not the experience I want. I wanna be able to go to a university and just love it and learn and spend my energy on studying and learning.”

“I was on, on Twitter and I even messaged Brian Schmidt on Twitter to just tell him I we'd had this really awful experience and he didn't even bother replying. Didn't care. So that, I think that really shows me that that's just ANU is about promoting ANU. It's a business. They, and it's rubbish what they're saying about, you know, being an amazing place of learning. It's not true. And that's unfortunately, yeah, the reality. Sorry. I wish I had nicer things to say for you, but.”

Yasmin

“When I transferred from [another university] to ANU was, um, a really scary decision and the reason why I didn't go to ANU in the beginning was because I just couldn't afford it. Um, and I remember taking a gap year just to try to afford one year of, uh, like ANU accommodation, because I didn't want to move off campus because like on campus was, you know, I hadn't lived by myself before. And it was just a bit of a safety net compared to just like going completely solo. Um, but I realized about six months in, you know, working minimum wage, like \$12 really. Um, if that's outside of the David Jones. So, um, you know, not making much at all. And I quickly realized I just, wasn't going to have the money required to afford ANU accommodation. So I

made the decision to go to [another university] and, um, where they gave me a five year, \$6,000 per year scholarship, which was what I wished ANU, you know, had available to me. And that was kind of like a, okay, it makes sense. Um, it doesn't make sense to, you know, put myself so far, much out of pocket with all this stress for ANU."

"And that was like except in 48 hours, um, and decided to take the plunge, but, um, doing so was pretty terrifying because with the amount of Centrelink I would be earning, it would like just cover rent and food, just like, with like \$0 to spare. And when you're moving up to ANU, there's so much more relocation costs. So, um, eventually when I did move up to ANU, I couldn't like I didn't couldn't even afford, there were things like social tickets, like there was the Berg-toga back in the day and just things like that, which you use to meet people. And that was a \$20 ticket and I couldn't spare the \$20, um, because of the really limited budget."

"Um, so I think that was the first difficulty there kind of the general costs of everything and the hardship and the fact that scholarships were really hard to come by. Um, and though I've been kind of a success story. I just happened to get the one scholarship that was available. You know, if I, if I didn't get that, it would have been really different."

"I think the second thing is probably feeling quite alienated from peers. And this is more emerged actually since being at [my residential hall]. And I feel really, really grateful to be there, but I also have a lot of concerns with how not diverse it is. Um, it's so rare you find because it's \$21,000 a year, of course. But, um, as a result, it's a very, um, streamlined, privileged cohort. So it's, you know, North Sydney private school. And to be honest, even the cultural diversities is lacking."

"I guess like throughout campus, because at the time, especially in the beginning I was struggling silently, so everyone was going to, you know, parties and social events. And I was in my room because I couldn't do those things. And, um, I know that kind of students bond from lack of money, but it's a different conversation when your parents are funding everything. And that was never me. And that was so many people, I think that I met that did have their parents to support them. Um, and it wasn't that my parents didn't want to support me. They just weren't able to. So I think that was, um, you know, quite difficult to listen silently and not being able to kind of talk about it."

"So when I found her, I was like, 'Oh my God, you're like my soul sister. Like, where are we?' You know, we were so similar and had such similar hardships, um, and you know, background before ANU, and there was something that was, so it was just so nice. It was the first and really like one of the only times that's ever happened where I've met someone and their story I was like, 'yeah, that's completely like similar to my experience'. Um, yeah. So I think it was, um, you know, having those interactions was, was also really powerful because before then it was, um, yeah, I hadn't met a single person that had come from that background, at least that explicitly said, so, so yeah."

"I think that, um, and, and I've also like I've tried my best to mentor the low income students that I do know. So there was one guy who, um, was also going for that scholarship. And he also went, you know, came from Logan and his parents were low income. You know, I tried my best to mentor him there, so like I'm trying to create the networks and support. Um, but yeah, it's, it's, yeah. I still find with lots of these spaces, there's still that lack of representation of low income kids, just everywhere."

"I think scholarships was absolutely without doubt the number one thing that, um, helped me because at the end of the day it is just lack of money. Um, so once I was able to kind of, you know, breathe, I wasn't sinking and that was, um, a really liberating feeling. But I think the second, I mean, I think really the second thing was having friends and support, like, you know, again, I think about like [my friend] and I think about what she went and she's had even even worse cause she hasn't had the privilege of scholarships. Um, so it was having, I think those support networks that even when I got into spaces that were quite frustrating in the lack of

representation, you know, especially at [my residential hall], um, it was quite, yeah, to be honest, a draining and isolating experience from that end. And that's not a unique thing that I just felt that was something I've heard across the board. Um, from again, like culturally diverse students, all the way to low income students, I've heard the same thing. Um, but I think to have people that understood really, really made a difference because it kind of gave me the backing and support that when I did feel frustrated, it was like, okay, it's not just me. I'm not crazy. And people felt this as well."

"I was fortunate to get [Award] and there were all these accolades and leadership things and it's like, wow. But I got rejected from the first round of [Scholarship]. I didn't get a single ANU scholarship when I first applied. I got rejected from res halls in my first year, because I guess, you know, with all the circumstances, um, I had really nothing to prove myself, but if you had asked me the vision that I wanted to create for Australia, I could have given you a long list of everything I wanted to see changed. So, um, for me, it's the idea of like that ANU promotes this idea of leadership and success and expect students coming in to kind of conform to that idea of, you know, having a lot of stuff that they've done and having a list of extracurriculars and, and again, like just like celebrating leadership, but there was so much behind that. So now I'm, now ANU recognizes me and I appreciate that, but in the very beginning it was like I was shouting to a cement wall and I just couldn't get in for the first, you know, for the first, my gap year and my first year of uni at [another university]. Um, so the whole experience in the beginning, it was very draining, quite humiliating, to be honest and not get a single scholarship at all. Um, and just like very stressful and disheartening. It was, it was a really, really tough experience. And I really felt like ANU just didn't want me, they really just didn't want me."

"I wish that ANU students didn't see low-income students just as something to feel bad for, but it's really an opportunity for them to have genuinely diverse perspectives. And that's something I hope I always bring, whenever I talk about this stuff, you know, different way of looking at things and people that could be leaders in the future. So, um, there's this, I guess, is still like this idea that, you know, equity students aren't, um, it just doesn't seem like they, they just kind of view them as a liability or a burden, but there's a lot of power in their presence on campus and giving that opportunity to someone that usually wouldn't be able to be in these spaces. So I wish they saw like the fact that my success is an iceberg and they see the little tip, but there's so much underneath that, um, was a lot of struggle just by myself without support."

Appendix B

Methodology for exploring the experiences of university for students from low-SES backgrounds at ANU

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to outline the study protocol undertaken in this qualitative examination of the experiences of low-SES students at ANU. The results of this study will not be comprehensively detailed here. An academic paper is currently under review for publication and includes more detailed results.

Data collection

Ethics approval was obtained from the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. This study uses qualitative data obtained from interviewing 12 self-identified low-SES college students at an elite higher education institution in Australia. This work comprises multiple case studies where individual participants were selected as a unique perspective on the experience of a low-SES student at an elite institution. Participants were randomly selected via callouts on social media and personal correspondence over the period of September 2020 to April 2022. Interviewees comprised of current or recent Australian undergraduate students that self-identified as low-SES.

Students participated in a single one-on-one loosely structured interview over an online video-call service which took approximately 60 – 90 minutes. The interviews were based around the theme of their broad experience as a low-SES student and structures and institutions that provided them support. Interviews allowed for participants to expand on their answers. One participant needed to be interviewed twice due to data loss. Interviews were transcribed using the online automatic transcription software Temi™ and were then manually corrected for errors.

Results synthesis

Transcripts were coded independently by two researchers who first examined individual transcripts for themes before conducting a comparative thematic analysis across all 12 interviewees. A grounding approach was taken to code transcripts. Researchers then discussed findings to compare identified themes to build a combined thematic analysis of both individual cases and across all participants.

Aggregate participant details

Twelve participants were recruited for this study. All interviewees were domestic undergraduate students. Of these students, eight lived at a residential hall and four resided off-campus. Two students were from the ACT and the remaining 10 were from interstate. Interviewees studied a range of different academic colleges including CASS, CoS, CAP, CoL and CHM. The majority of students received Centrelink benefits at some point during their degree program.

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