EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS…

(Article in Illawarra Business Chamber's quarterly magazine "Better Business")

It’s official: the Illawarra’s vibrant multicultural community is good for business.

But does your business think ‘international’?

Overseas students at the University of Wollongong (UOW) boost the local economy by an estimated $100 million per year. Each student spends an estimated $10,000 per annum in the local economy on food, accommodation, clothes, transport, consumer goods, entertainment etc. This demand encourages investment and creates jobs.

Overseas students are not, however, passive consumers. They have skills, networks and plans for the future. Included them in your plans and you have the opportunity to build lasting international partnership0s. Offering an overseas student work experience, or a part-time job, builds cultural understanding, friendship0s and networks in an increasingly globalised market. A relationship forged in the Illawarra may open unexp0ected doors overseas for your business or you may identify a profitable niche in the local market. In return, students enhance their own networks and gain valuable language, cultural and business skills.

UOW attracts students from more than 70 different nations. Your business can reach out to them in a number of ways. Getting to know more about cultures, customs and habits helps you keep your customers happy and attract new ones.

If your staff offer friendly, unbiased assistance and make new students feel welcome, regardless of their app0earance, dress, accent or language skills, your reputation will be enhanced. Word of mouth recommendations are invaluable. If students know they get good service at your retail outlet, restaurant or service, they will tell their friends. Conversely, if staff members are rude cold, unhelpful, or if a customer is made to feel uncomfortable because of their dress, your business will be avoided.

Employing a student with a good understanding of multicultural issues and/or language skills makes customers feel welcome and helps you target new markets. They can also train your existing staff and make them feel more comfortable with cultural diversity. If you staff are thinking from a multicultural perspective, they are more likely to think of ways to expand your customer base.

UOW has a strong internationalist stance and runs a successful Study Abroad program for domestic students. Australian students can undertake part of their course overseas, returning with skills, languages and multicultural understanding. Their skills may be useful in your business.

The UniCentre JobShop helps all students find work. If you are interested in employing a student with multicultural skills or a second language, or are able to offer work experience, phone the UniCentre JobShop on 42214622.

Perhaps you are interested in meeting some students from other countries and cultures. You could invite a small group to join your staff at a barbecue, for example. Students are always keen to make contact with people from the local community and social activities are a great tarting point. A friendly sporting event is another possibility, or you could offer students a tour of inspection of your business as a PR exercise. You will find any of these activities to be rewarding and enjoyable, and who knows what valuable future business contacts may develop as a result.

To make contact with international students on a social level, phone the University’s International Student Advisers, Robyn Ngui (42214742) and Denise Hull (42213173). Or you can contact the Illawarra Committee for International Students (ICIS) as this voluntary group organises social and other activities for international students. Ring Indrani Doloswala on 42213158 on Wednesday or Friday.

Surfing Diversity is UOW’s unique multicultural awareness program. It celebrates cultural harmony on campus and in the wider community. It builds links between cultural groups, on and off campus. Surfing Diversity has recently published a fact sheet about myths and realities associated with cultural diversity.

Surfing Diversity is an initiative of UOW’s Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Unit, proudly supported by the Federal Government’s Living in Harmony initiative. Administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, this initiative aims to promote community harmony and reduce racial intolerance. For more information on the Living in Harmony initiative, visit 222.immi.gov.au/harmony.

For more information on Surfing Diversity projects and activities, contact staff in the EEO Unit on 42213917.