

# Empathy to Experience: Student Journey Mapping Project

February 2020



# Empathy to Experience: Student Journey Mapping Project

## Executive summary

Phase 1 of the Empathy to Experience: Student Journey Mapping project was completed internally in Quarter 4 2018 and focused on understanding the current experience of domestic students for the following journey stages: Apply, Offer, Enrol, and Timetable.

The following stages of the Student Journey Mapping project begun at the end of 2019 and was completed in Q1 2020. The purpose of the project was to further validate the insights from Phase 1 as well as uncover actionable insights for the remaining stages of the journey, for all student cohorts. The insights from the project will allow ACU to make tangible improvements to the student experience.

Using deep ethnographic research with 120 students across all campuses we uncovered a multitude of opportunities for improvement, most importantly around helping students design and track their courses more smoothly, ensuring consistency of information across all channels, removing sequencing issues, and fostering a sense of belonging from the start.

The outcomes of this project are captured in a searchable insights library which will be continually updated by the UX team and made available as

a resource to help ACU identify opportunities to improve the student experience, a current state and ideal state journey map, and a collection of recommendations. The insights from the project are already being leveraged for current projects, such as the re-design of the timetabling system.

It is important to note that the insights from this project reflect the students' perspective, and what they see as reality. They might not always describe the full picture, or reflect what we as staff believe to be true. Because of this, the opportunity areas and recommendations center around student desirability. Staff will be engaged to explore and shape the opportunities arising from this work.

Additionally, there are some areas of the student experience that are not captured yet, as well as moments and cohorts that would benefit from deeper exploration. The outcomes of the work will continue to be built upon as we learn more about our students.

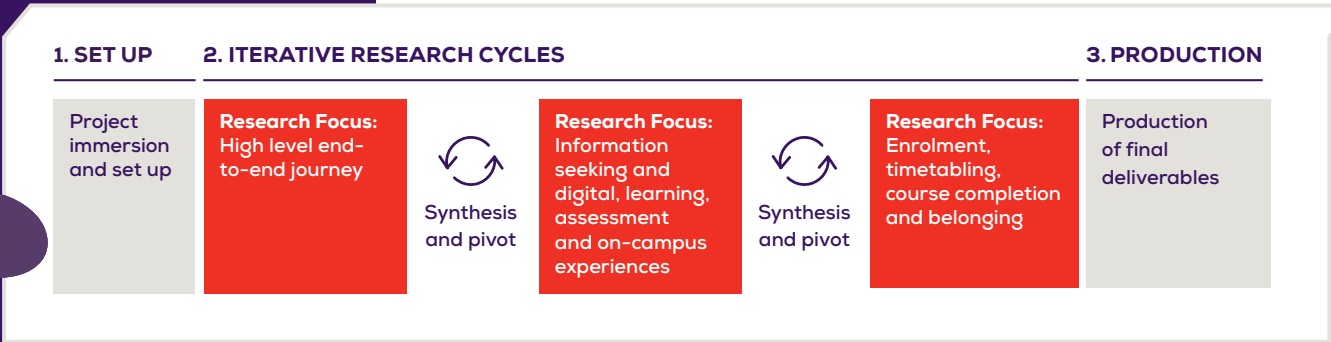
## Project approach

### PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project was divided into the following phases: Set up, Iterative research cycles, and Production. The Set up phase focused on immersing into existing ACU student experience research, and looked at the outcomes of Phase 1 of the Journey Mapping project, a Lapsed offer study, an Attrition study, a Communication Channels and Research Behaviour study, and a Graduation Experience study. The outcomes of these pieces of work are incorporated into the deliverables of this project.

The Research and Synthesis phase was divided into three rounds. The first research round focused on the high-level student experience, the second round looked at how students seek information and their digital, learning, assessment and on-campus experiences, and the third round zoomed into settling in and belonging, as well as key moments such as timetabling, course completion and becoming an Alumni.

The Production phase focused on consolidating all findings and recommendations into the final deliverables.



### METHOD

To gain a deep understanding of the student experience, we used a Human-Centred Design (HCD) approach. HCD uses qualitative research methods to uncover people's behaviours, needs, and expectations. Overall, we conducted 120 60/90min interviews with 1-3 students in the room. The breakdown of participants can be found on the right.

We spoke to:  
**120**  
STUDENTS IN TOTAL

**93**  
DOMESTIC STUDENTS

**27**  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**72**  
UNDERGRAD  
UG

**32**  
POSTGRAD  
PG

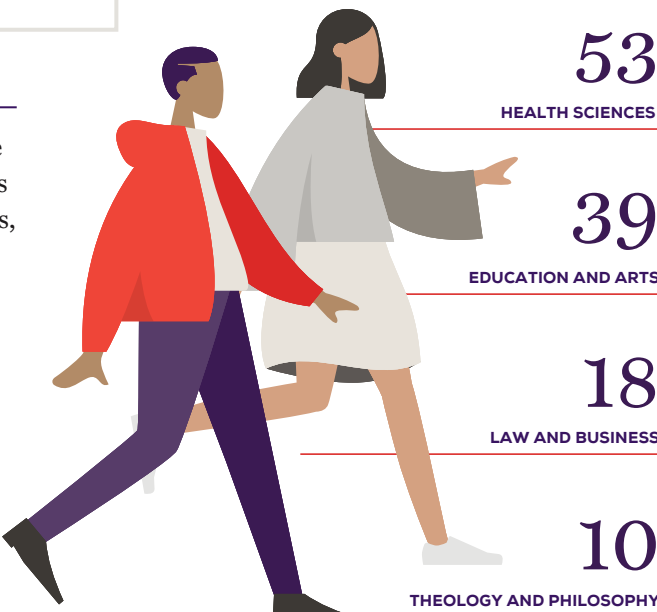
**16**  
ALUMNI  
A

Across these campuses:

NORTH SYDNEY	22 students
STRATHFIELD	7 students
MELBOURNE	52 students
BALLARAT	8 students
BRISBANE	24 students
CANBERRA	7 students

Across all Faculties:

53	HEALTH SCIENCES
39	EDUCATION AND ARTS
18	LAW AND BUSINESS
10	THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY



# Overarching insights and opportunities

Through our research, we discovered overarching insights that manifest themselves as multiple pain points throughout the student journey. Below is a summary of those insights, and top opportunity areas we identified.



## TOP INSIGHT 1

### Information is inconsistent, or inadequate across channels

Students find inconsistent information across channels, which results in low trust and cross-checking. One of the reasons for inconsistencies is that students believe systems are slow to reflect changes. If students cannot find the right information on their own or with the help of peers, they resort to asking staff for help or reassurance. This often means that information flows in informal ways, and some students miss out.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

How might we provide consistent, timely, and easy to access information, to establish trust and empower students to find information independently?

- **How might we** ensure all information is correct and consistent across channels, and that changes can be easily reflected in real time?
- **How might we** build consistent ways to structure and organise key information so that students can find what they need quickly and confidently?
- **How might we** streamline information to reduce clutter for crucial channels and minimise overwhelming communications?
- **How might we** provide students with a single place to go for everything they need, in a channel and interface that suits them?

## TOP INSIGHT 2

### Staff pull strings and students hack the system

When a problem arises, students often resort to asking staff for help, as they find staff extremely helpful. Staff often go above and beyond to help students, which is fantastic for one-on-one interactions, but it is not easily scalable, as staff have different approaches to solving the same problems. Asking for personal support is just one way students try to get around obstacles - over time they learn tricks they can do on their own e.g. they swap placements with peers, or enrol for units just to get unit outlines and then un-enrol.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

How might we set students up for success with every interaction, by ensuring that the students can independently solve their enquiries and know where to look for help in more complex cases?

- **How might we** identify and eliminate the most common system and process problems that arise, so that students' needs are met seamlessly.
- **How might we** anticipate students needs and proactively offer them help and support in a scalable way at moments we know they seek help and reassurance?
- **How might we** create a baseline for solving the most common problems that students face, so that staff across ACU know how to consistently help students?
- **How might we** ensure that students are aware of all support services, so that they know where to look for different or specific types of help?
- **How might we** amplify the positive impact of the course coordinator role, and ensure they can focus on supporting students who need most help?

## TOP INSIGHT 3

### Sequencing and timing issues happen all across the journey

Students often experience things happening out of order, or too late. From a sequencing point of view, issues with enrolment are the root cause of units happening at the wrong time, or in the wrong sequence. When it comes to timing, placement is the biggest source of stress, with preparations feeling last minute. There are also more specific instances of sequencing issues - for example feedback coming too late, meaning students are unable to use it to improve their next assessment.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

How might we identify root causes of major sequencing and timing issues, to ensure that the student experience is not negatively impacted by things within our control?

- **How might we** simplify the enrolment process for students so their degrees are not prolonged due to mistakes early on?
- **How might we** empower students to design and track their own progress through their course?
- **How might we** help students feel more prepared for placements?
- **How might we** make it easy for ACU to identify specific sequencing on timing issues through the student journey?

## TOP INSIGHT 4

### It takes students a long time to feel a sense of belonging

Overall, students find the ACU culture positive, warm, and inviting. However, many students take a long time to settling in and feel a sense of belonging. It is difficult for them to find like-minded people, it takes time to develop relationships with staff, and there are not enough physical spaces that foster connections. Students who study online full time find it even more difficult to connect with others.

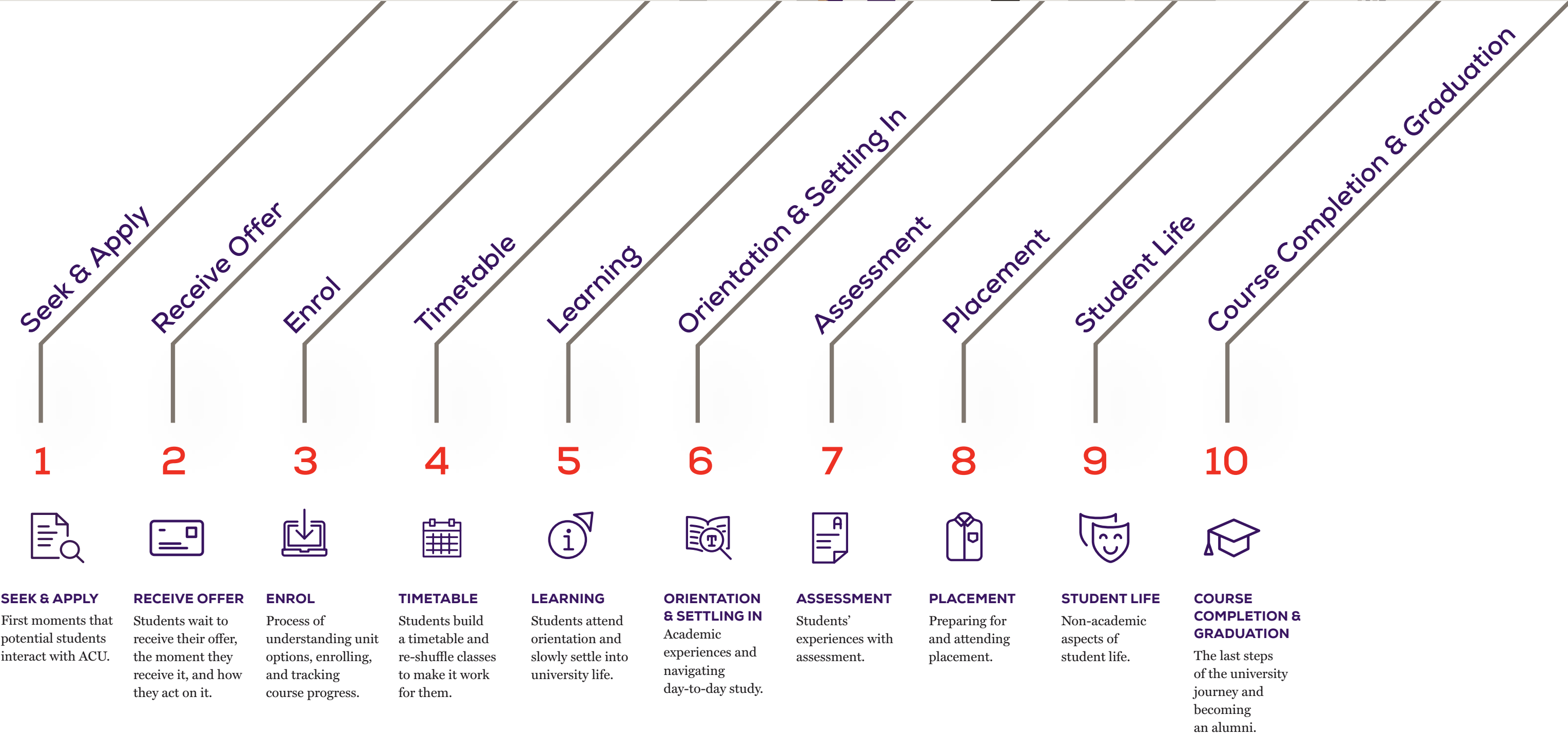
## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

How might we help students feel a sense of belonging to ACU early in their journey?

- **How might we** help students connect with each other earlier in the journey, before they even start their course?
- **How might we** help students by creating structured ways to find like-minded people?
- **How might we** facilitate introductions and meetings within the crucial first few weeks of starting classes?
- **How might we** help students find the informal networks others create online to support each other?

# Journey Map Chapters

Below is an overview of the journey stages that we refer to as ‘chapters’ that the Student Journey Mapping project focused on.





# Deliverables overview

## Overview pages

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary page provides an overview of the project purpose and outcomes. It also outlines the project structure and method.



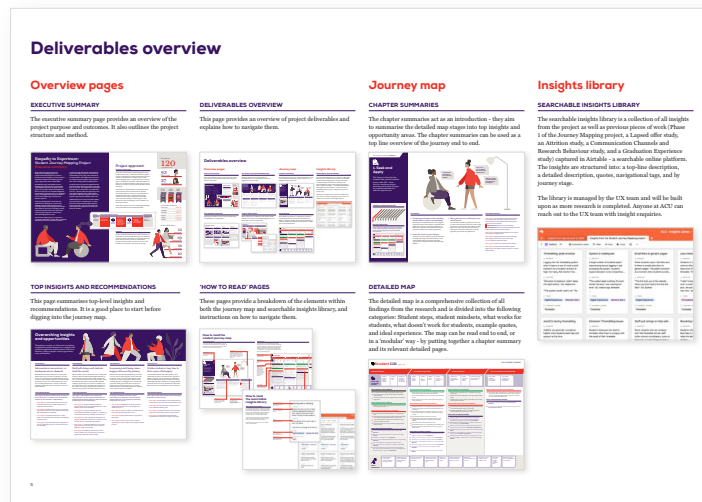
## TOP INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This page summarises top-level insights and recommendations. It is a good place to start before digging into the journey map.



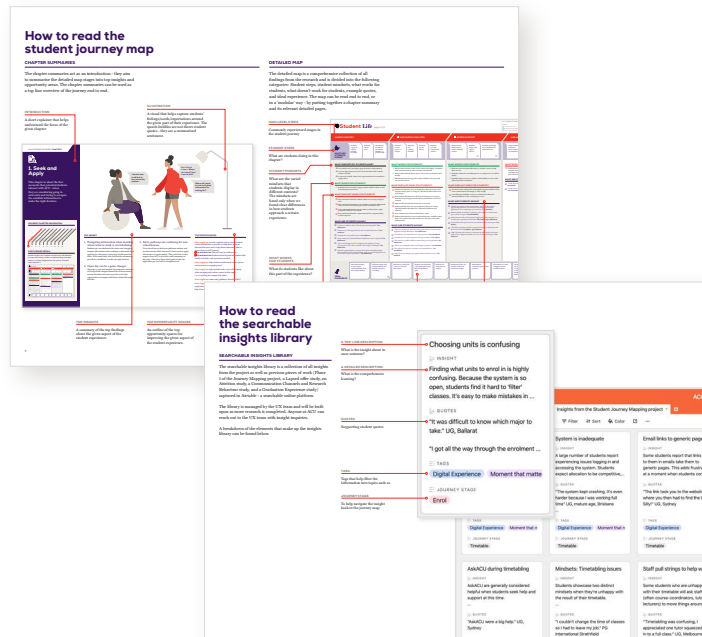
## DELIVERABLES OVERVIEW

This page provides an overview of project deliverables and explains how to navigate them.



## 'HOW TO READ' PAGES

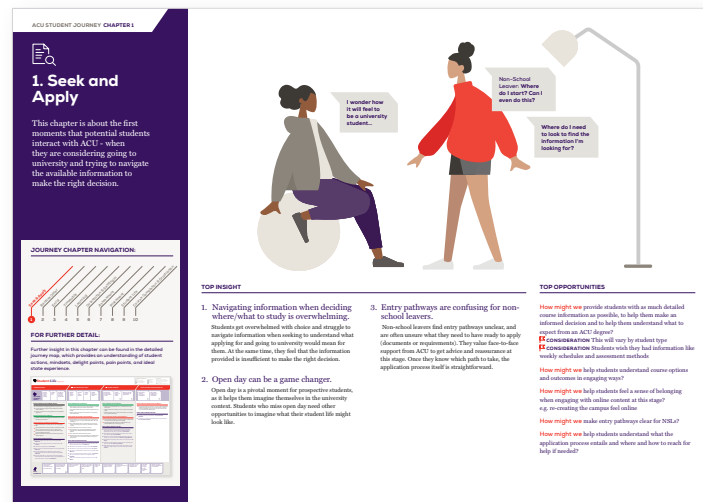
These pages provide a breakdown of the elements within both the journey map and searchable insights library, and instructions on how to navigate them.



## Journey map

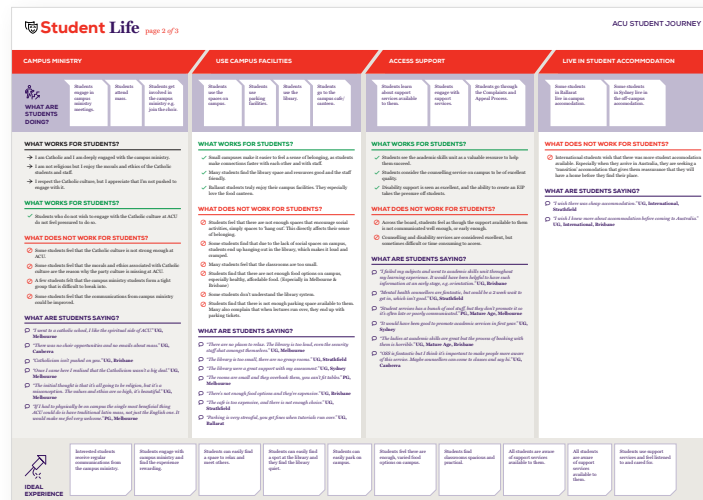
## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The chapter summaries act as an introduction - they aim to summarise the detailed map stages into top insights and opportunity areas. The chapter summaries can be used as a top line overview of the journey end to end.



## DETAILED MAP

The detailed map is a comprehensive collection of all findings from the research and is divided into the following categories: Student steps, student mindsets, what works for students, what doesn't work for students, example quotes, and ideal experience. The map can be read end to end, or in a 'modular' way - by putting together a chapter summary and its relevant detailed pages.

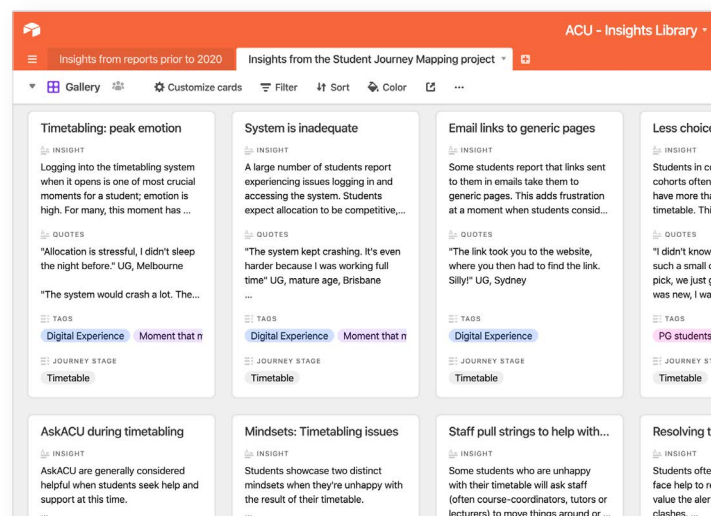


## Insights library

**SEARCHABLE INSIGHTS LIBRARY**

The searchable insights library is a collection of all insights from the project as well as previous pieces of work (Phase 1 of the Journey Mapping project, a Lapsed offer study, an Attrition study, a Communication Channels and Research Behaviour study, and a Graduation Experience study) captured in [Airtable](#) - a searchable online platform. The insights are structured into: a top-line description, a detailed description, quotes, navigational tags, and by journey stage.

The library is managed by the UX team and will be built upon as more research is completed. Anyone at ACU can reach out to the UX team with insight enquiries.



# How to read the searchable insights library

## SEARCHABLE INSIGHTS LIBRARY

The searchable insights library is a collection of all insights from the project as well as previous pieces of work (Phase 1 of the Journey Mapping project, a Lapsed offer study, an Attrition study, a Communication Channels and Research Behaviour study, and a Graduation Experience study) captured in Airtable - a searchable online platform.

The library is managed by the UX team and will be built upon as more research is completed. Anyone at ACU can reach out to the UX team with insight inquiries.

A breakdown of the elements that make up the insights library can be found below.

### A TOP-LINE DESCRIPTION:

What is the insight about in once sentence?

### A DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

What is the comprehensive learning?

### QUOTES:

Supporting student quotes

### TAGS:

Tags that help filter the information into topics such as Info and comms, Digital experience, Moment that matters, Opportunity for further research, PG students, Mature age students, International students etc.

### JOURNEY STAGE:

To help navigate the insight back to the journey map

## Choosing units is confusing

### INSIGHT

Finding what units to enrol in is highly confusing. Because the system is so open, students find it hard to 'filter' classes. It's easy to make mistakes in ...

### QUOTES

"It was difficult to know which major to take." UG, Ballarat

"I got all the way through the enrolment ...

### TAGS

Digital Experience Moment that matte

### JOURNEY STAGE

Enrol

### TAGS

Digital Experience Moment that n

### JOURNEY STAGE

Timetable

### TAGS

Digital Experience Moment that n

### JOURNEY STAGE

Timetable

### TAGS

Digital Experience

### JOURNEY STAGE

Timetable

## AskACU during timetabling

### INSIGHT

AskACU are generally considered helpful when students seek help and support at this time.

...

### QUOTES

"AskACU were a big help." UG, Sydney

## Mindsets: Timetabling issues

### INSIGHT

Students showcase two distinct mindsets when they're unhappy with the result of their timetable.

...

### QUOTES

"I couldn't change the time of classes so I had to leave my job." PG International Strathfield

## Staff pull strings to help with...

### INSIGHT

Some students who are unhappy with their timetable will ask staff (often course-coordinators, tutors or lecturers) to move things around or ...

### QUOTES

"Timetabling was confusing, I appreciated one tutor squeezed me in to a full class." UG, Melbourne



# How to read the student journey map

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

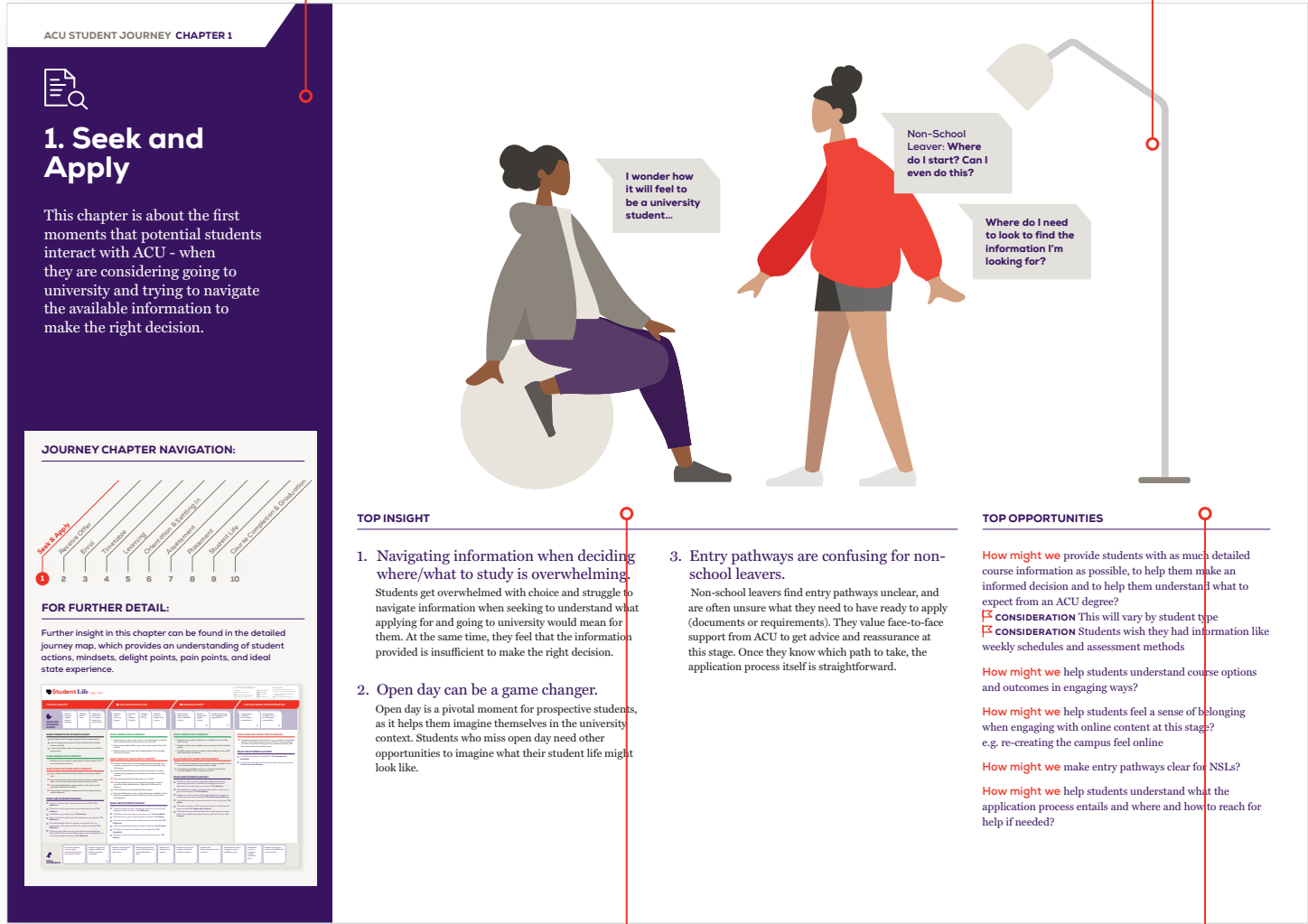
The chapter summaries act as an introduction - they aim to summarise the detailed map stages into top insights and opportunity areas. The chapter summaries can be used as a top line overview of the journey end to end.

### INTRODUCTION

A short explainer that helps understand the focus of the given chapter.

### ILLUSTRATION

A visual that helps capture students’ feelings/needs/expectations around the given part of their experience. The speech bubbles are not direct student quotes - they are a summarised sentiment.



### TOP INSIGHTS

A summary of the top findings about the given aspect of the student experience.

### TOP OPPORTUNITY SPACES

An outline of the top opportunity spaces for improving the given aspect of the student experience.

## DETAILED MAP

The detailed map is a comprehensive collection of all findings from the research and is divided into the following categories: Student steps, student mindsets, what works for students, what doesn’t work for students, example quotes, and ideal experience. The map can be read end to end, or in a ‘modular’ way - by putting together a chapter summary and its relevant detailed pages.

### HIGH LEVEL STEPS

Commonly experienced stages in the student journey

### STUDENT STEPS

What are students doing in this chapter?

### STUDENT MINDSETS

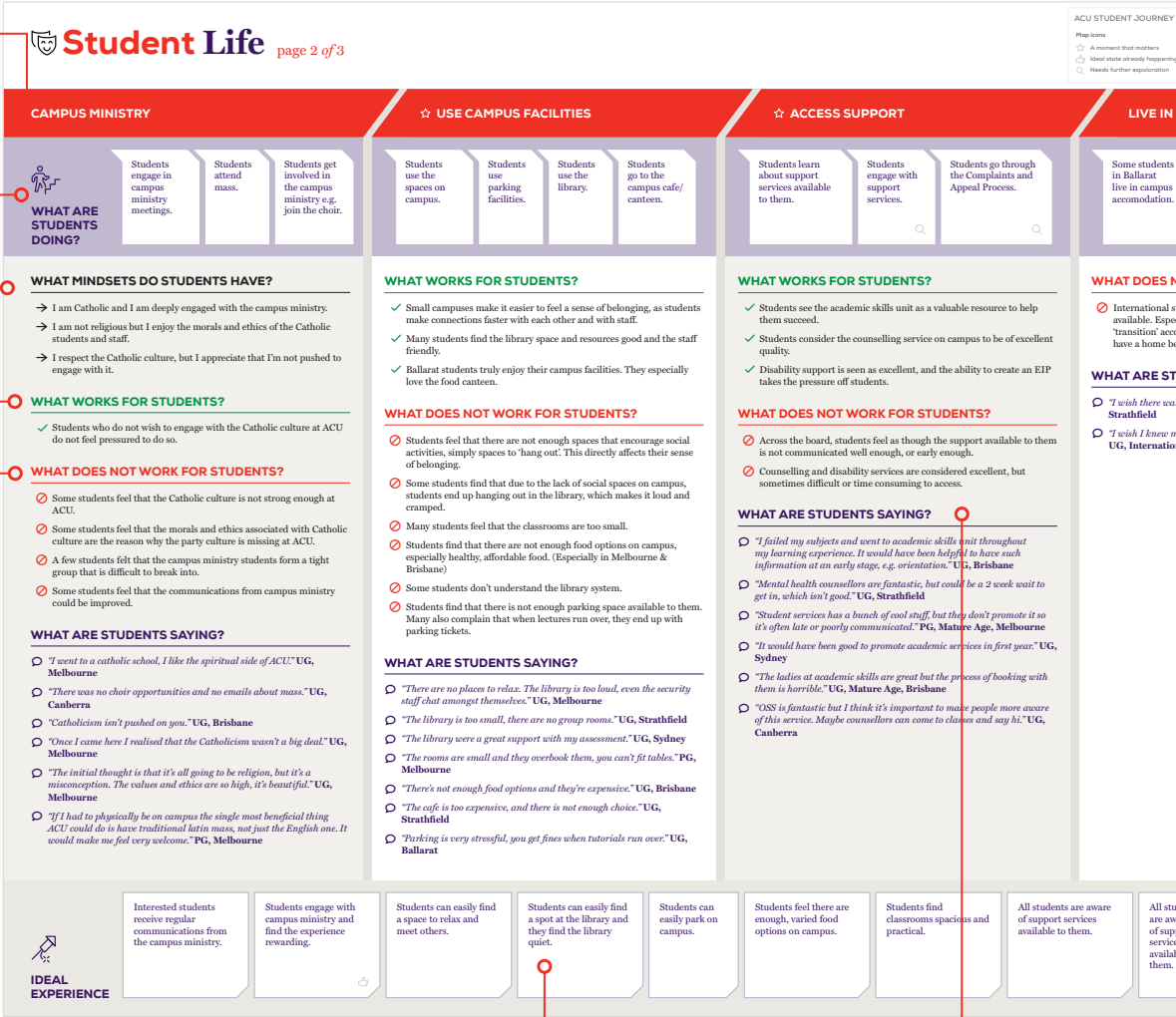
What are the varied mindsets that students display in different contexts? The mindsets are listed only when we found clear differences in how students approach a certain experience.

### WHAT WORKS FOR STUDENTS

What do students like about this part of the experience?

### WHAT DOESN'T WORK FOR STUDENTS

What are they most common pain points around this experience?



### IDEAL EXPERIENCE

What would students ideally like to happen? This is a pure desirability view and it requires staff input to understand feasibility and viability. The purpose of ideal state is to act as inspiration - or the ultimate goal.

### EXAMPLE QUOTES

Supporting quotes to help empathise with the students. The quotes on the map are examples, not a comprehensive list of all quotes around a given experience.