

Experiences as an International student residing at a residential post-graduate college

I lived in Kathleen Lumley College (KLC), a postgraduate residence affiliated to the University of Adelaide, between February 2005 and March 2009. During that period I completed a Graduate Diploma in Education and a Masters in Information Technology.

Whilst living in the college I was the subject of some horrific bullying by other residents in the college, I also witnessed racism and neglect towards other international students. The bullying took the form of verbal abuse, the spreading of false accusations, emails distributed to residents encouraging them to victimise me and graffiti (about me) written on public walls.

I made numerous complaints to the college authorities about this, however, not only did they see fit to do nothing about the incidents they eventually told me to move out of the college.

On one occasion I made four verbal and one written complaint to the college about the bullying, the college waited for SIX WEEKS to respond to my complaint. By that time the bully (an Australian) in question had moved out of the college, which the college authorities were fully aware he was intending to do, and their eventual response was that they could not do anything as he was no longer in residence.

Not only did the college refuse to deal with my complaints, they actually discriminated against me. After several weeks of seeing offensive graffiti written about me, I verbally responded to one of the Australian residents who had been writing the slurs. This resident then complained to the Master of Kathleen Lumley College and I was called into a meeting with him. I said that I would respond to his complaint in writing and provided photos and a letter of complaint to the Master. I never received any response to my letter and no action was ever taken against the Australian resident.

In February, 2009, I was told to move out of the College because, as the Master told me, my room was required by a new resident. In the four years I had lived at the College no resident had ever been asked to leave the college. After moving out, my room remained empty for over

three weeks and there were several other empty rooms in the college at the time. Incidentally, my rent was fully paid up and I was not in arrears

The results of this bullying have taken a tremendous toll on me. My study was severely affected, I required several months of documented counselling, and despite dropping a number of courses I failed at least one course every semester. I actually graduated one year later than expected and with lower grades than I would have had I not been the victim of bullying and harassment. Financially it has been disastrous, I had to spend a further \$10,000 retaking courses I had failed, another \$20,000 in living expenses for the extra year I had to study. This included having to renew my student visa which, owing to the lack of an official student visa renewal class, cost me the same fees I incurred when I first applied for my student visa.

Had I graduated in 2007 as I was supposed to, I would have been working for a full year and have thus effectively lost an entire year's salary. I also graduated into the current recession which has made it very difficult for me to find employment. I am currently effectively homeless and I had to drop my plans to continue my studies after I was forced to leave the College. To throw an International student out on the street with no job, no money and no status within Australia was utterly heartless and vindictive.

A number of other International students were unhappy with life in the college. Their main concerns centred on a clique of mainly Australian, North American and European students who did not interact with them, took control of the KLC Residents Association and affected their study by holding noisy parties during the exam period. One Indian student was even racially abused by an Australian resident for no reason (the Master of the College was aware of this incident and, again, took no action against the Australian resident). More recently a Sri Lankan Muslim student was awoken in the early hours by this same clique of residents who were drinking and chatting loudly outside her room. The next morning she opened her door to find the area strewn with empty beer cans and vomit.

Through my involvement with the Adelaide University Postgraduate Student Association (AUPGSA) I was a member of the KLC Council for three years. I made several complaints on behalf of these International students in regard to the behaviour of this clique of residents. None of my complaints were listened to or acted upon. It was after a letter of complaint from the AUPGSA was sent to the College Council in February, 2009, that I was told to leave the college.

The college sees International students as transients and therefore any problems that occur are also transient and will eventually "go away" when the student leaves or returns to their home country. Furthermore, as my case highlights any student who does not "go away" and continues to raise issues of concern, either about their own welfare, or that of their fellow international residents, will be evicted. I have seen many International students come and go from the college. Many have left with a very bad impression citing discrimination, self-interest and the careless attitude of the college towards their welfare and right to live and study in peace. They feel the college sees them as a cash cow and is not interested in collegiality or International student welfare. My own experience has ruined my experience of studying in Australia, the behaviour within and of Kathleen Lumley College itself has been the sole reason for this. I hope

you will see from this example that incidents against International Students do not just occur on the streets but in the very institutions that are supposed to protect and uphold the welfare and rights of ALL students regardless of their racial, religious or cultural background. I have fully documented evidence to support this statement and am willing to testify to my experiences as an international student in Adelaide.

Recommendations to the Committee

1. Establish an independent Ombudsman for International Students and domestic students that will hear cases such as the one above. The Ombudsman should oversee any areas relating to issues of student accommodation, student services, University matters, course and enrolment issues and visa issues. The Ombudsman should hold hearings and establish independent committees of **non-University affiliated** public officials (Justice of the Peace, Councillors etc.) to hear such cases and rule upon them.
2. Create a "Student Visa Renewal" sub-class. Annually many students have to renew their visas for various reasons and have to pay the full fees, including any health or IELTS tests that are required. A student visa renewal sub-class should cost considerably less than the initial visa as the student has already "cleared" most of the initial requirements once (security, language, health).