

# Launching a social program for International Students

Dr Emma Kerr  
Primary Prevention Counsellor  
Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)  
University of Newcastle



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# Outline

- Background and context
- Setting up
- How the program runs
- Evaluation data
- Key learnings
- Challenges and future directions



# Context

University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia

Six regional campuses

37,000 students, 7000 International Students  
(1500 commencing annually)

Medibank Funding



# Why run a social program?



**Social isolation and loneliness**



**Delay help-seeking**



**Student-run clubs can be inconsistent**



**Limited opportunities for repeated connection with the same people**



**NUMates**

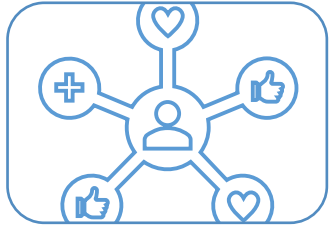
**BLACKBUTT  
RESERVE**

*Excursion!*

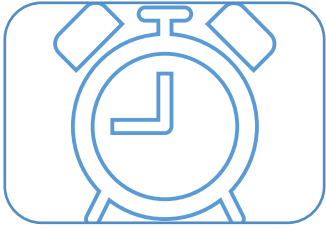
Thursday October 3rd  
1pm

See details on event page

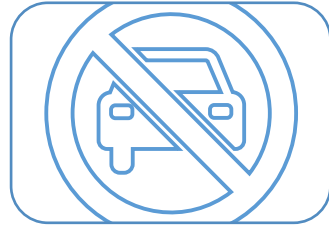
# What do students want?



**Social media**



**Frequent activities**



**Easy to get to**



**Free or low cost**



**Food & Cultural Celebrations**



# The Aims

To reduce isolation and facilitate social connections by:

1. Provide the opportunity to stay connected between events
2. To tie together existing university events for international students
3. To reach students who won't engage with formal supports
4. To make ourselves redundant

A promotional poster for NUmates, a group for international students. The poster features a network of circular photos of diverse students connected by lines, with a stylized gear icon at the center. The text includes the group name, a description, a QR code, and a sponsor logo.

**NUmates**

A group for International Students to connect, find new friends, and plan events together.

 **Scan to join**

Supported by  
**medibank**  
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# What we did

# Finding the right platform

## Requirements:

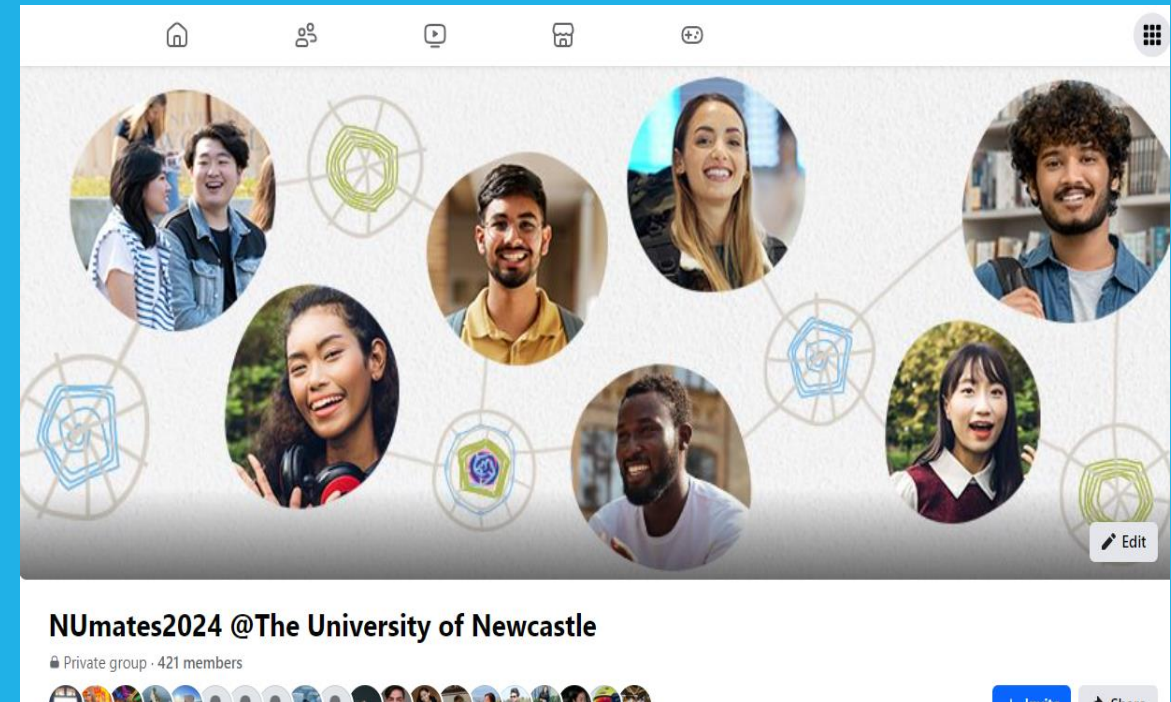
- Enables students to 'opt-in' or join
- Encourages peer-to-peer communication
- Capacity to 'create an event'
- Accessible to a broad range of students

## Options considered:

- Closed Facebook group
- Mentor platform
- Instagram
- WeChat



facebook



# Safety & Membership

Search for NUmates or use QR Code

Student requests to join

Name and student ID checked

Accepted or declined with a message

- Safety from scammers
- Sense of ownership and belonging

528 requests reviewed ▲ 0% ⓘ  
1 Mar 2024 - 9 Oct 2024

Approved

425

▲ 0%

Declined

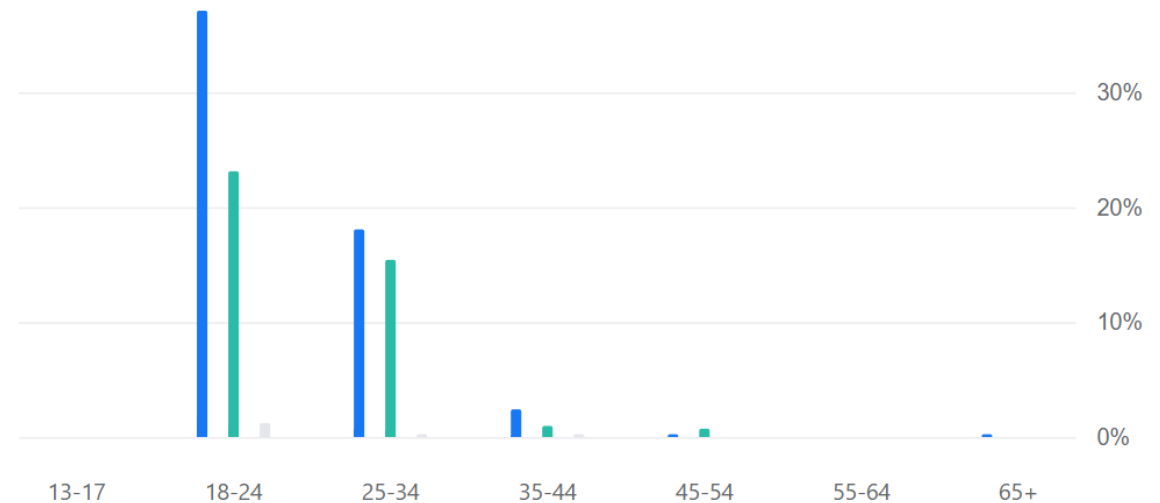
102

Blocked

1

Age and gender ⓘ

● 58% Female ● 40% Male ● 2% Custom



# Staffing

- **0.4 FTE Project Officer**
- **0.2 FTE Student Leader**
- **Primary Prevention Counsellor  
(Coordinator)**



# Activities

- Card games
- Potluck
- Craft activities
- Beach/Bush walks
- Local attractions
- Uni expos (e.g., RUOK Day)
- Travel Q&A Session
- Residents 'Meet and Greet' (free coffee)
- Student Association free BBQs
- Barefoot Bowls
- Cooking workshop



# How it went (and what we learnt)



# Did students join the program?

- Commenced 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024
- 415 members

415 total members ⓘ

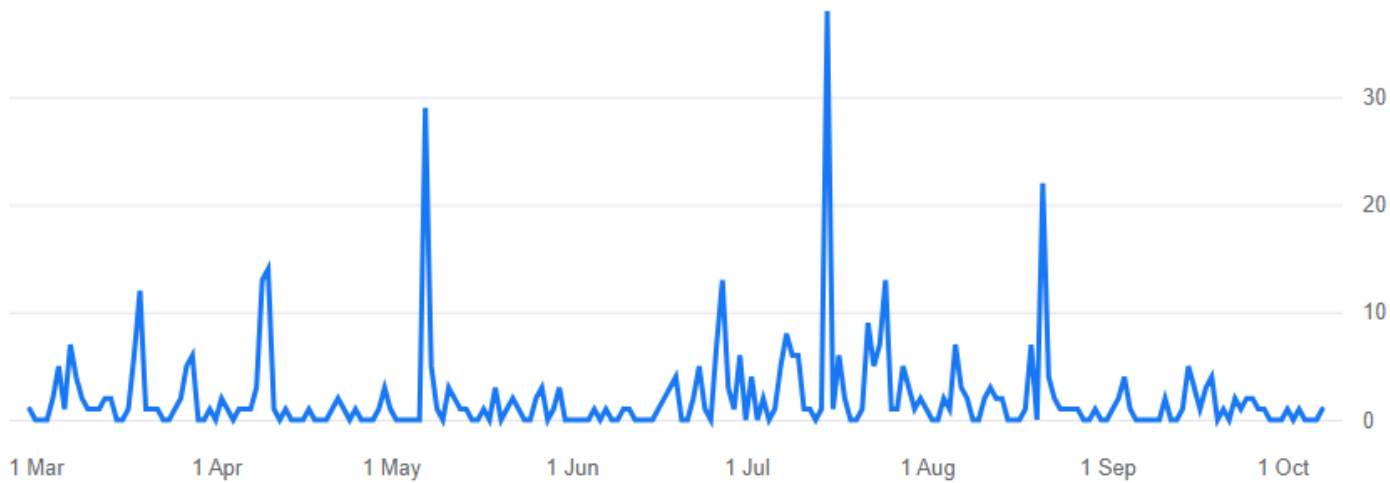
▲ 19.94% vs 9 Aug 2024

8 Oct 2024




462 membership requests ⓘ

1 Mar 2024 - 9 Oct 2024

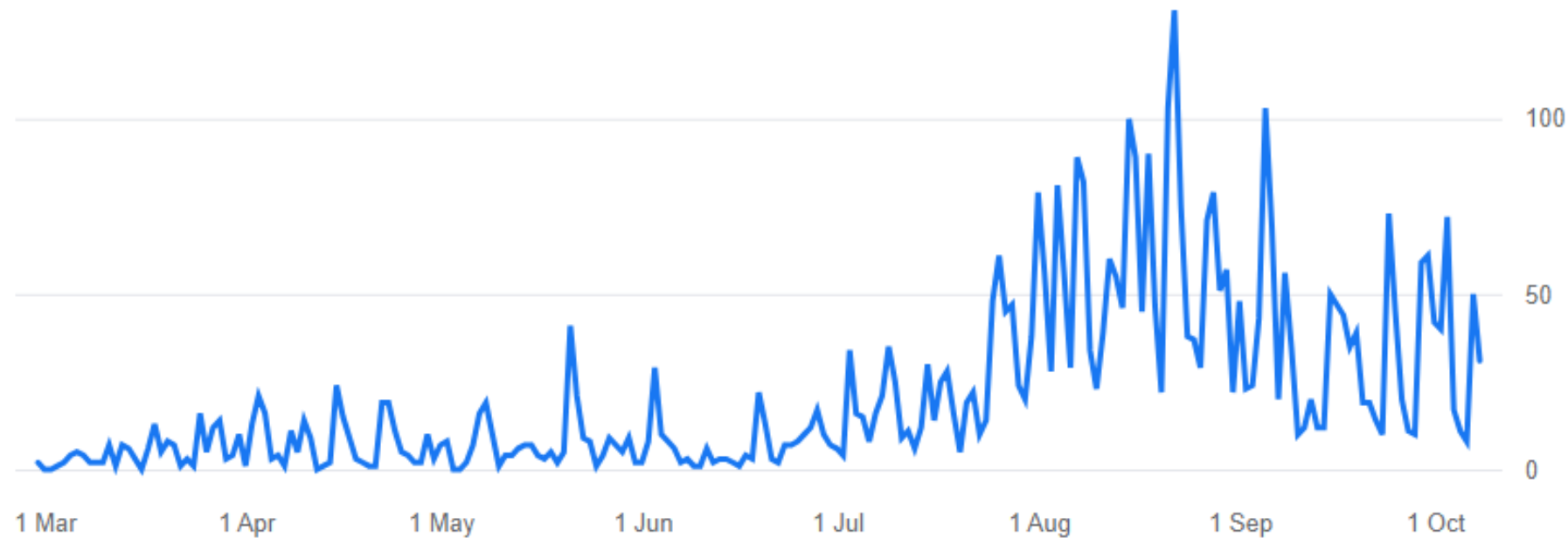


Number of new member requests per day (1 Mar - 9 Oct)

# Did students engage online?

341 active members 

1 Mar 2024 - 9 Oct 2024



Active members per day (1 Mar - 9 Oct)

\*Active members are defined by Facebook as “people who viewed, posted, commented or reacted to content on a given day.

# How did they engage?

## Students are not:

- Posting publicly on the page
- Liking or commenting on a post

## Students are:

- Commenting in the chats
- Spontaneous sharing
- Asking and responding to questions
- Moving to a side chat or creating their own What's App group



Any plans for weekend?

emma

Does anyone here have a ticket to the rugby game tomorrow? 😬 its my friends birthday



Hey are dogs allowed



Will anyone share today's photos



Hi everyone! 🙌 I'm planning to visit the university open day tomorrow. If anyone's interested in going together, let me know if you'd like to join!



What'll exactly happen in the open day?

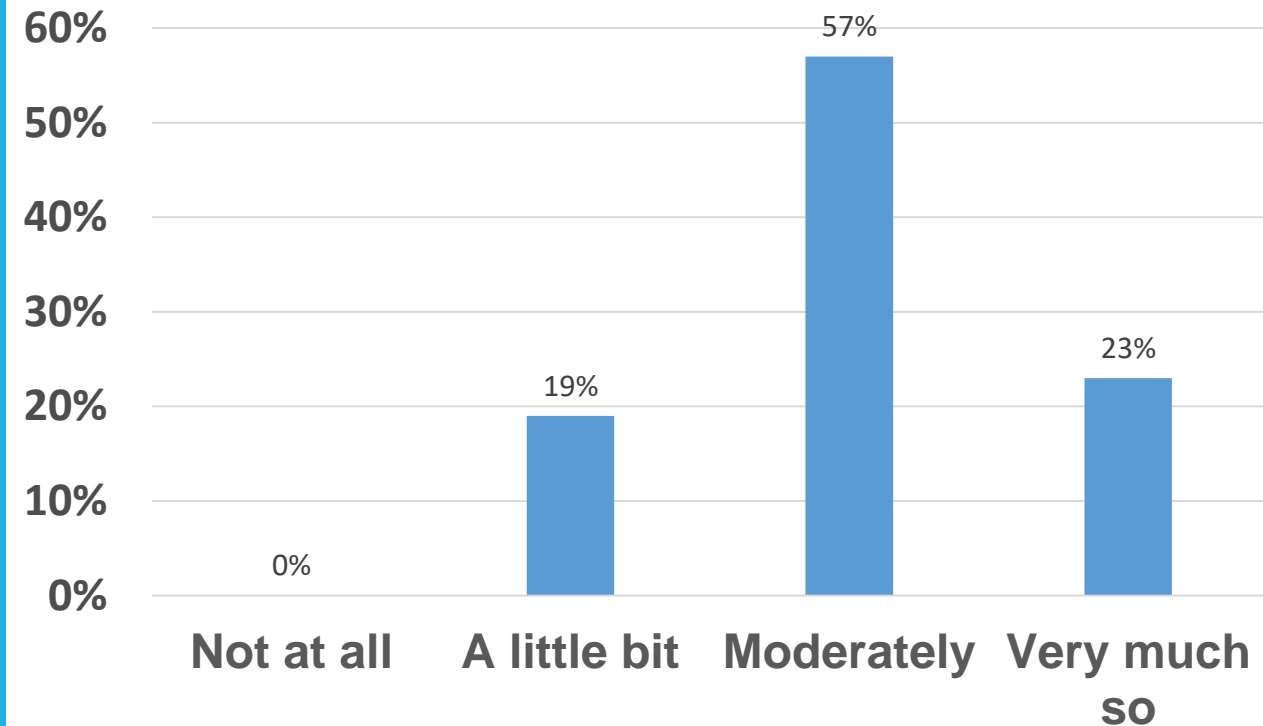
# Is it having an impact?

**62%** had attended a NUmates event.

**52%** reported making a new social connection due to attending a NUmates event.

**100%** said NUmates had made a difference in their experience studying at the University of Newcastle.

To what extent has NUmates helped you feel more supported and welcomed?

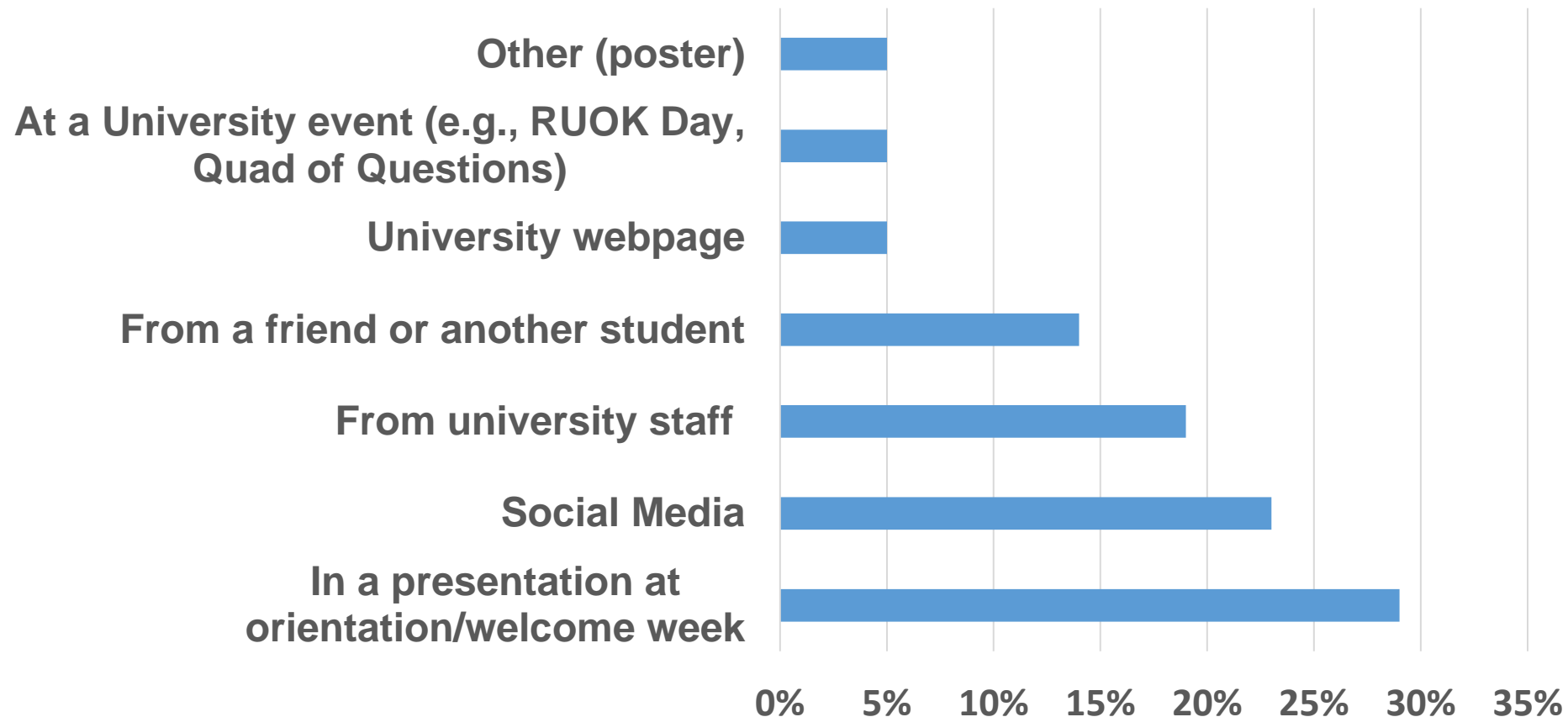


# Key Lessons: What worked?



# Promotion

## How did you first hear about NUmates?



# The Ang Effect

- **Creating welcome and belonging**
- **Social connector**
- **Knowledge of support services, university process and local area**



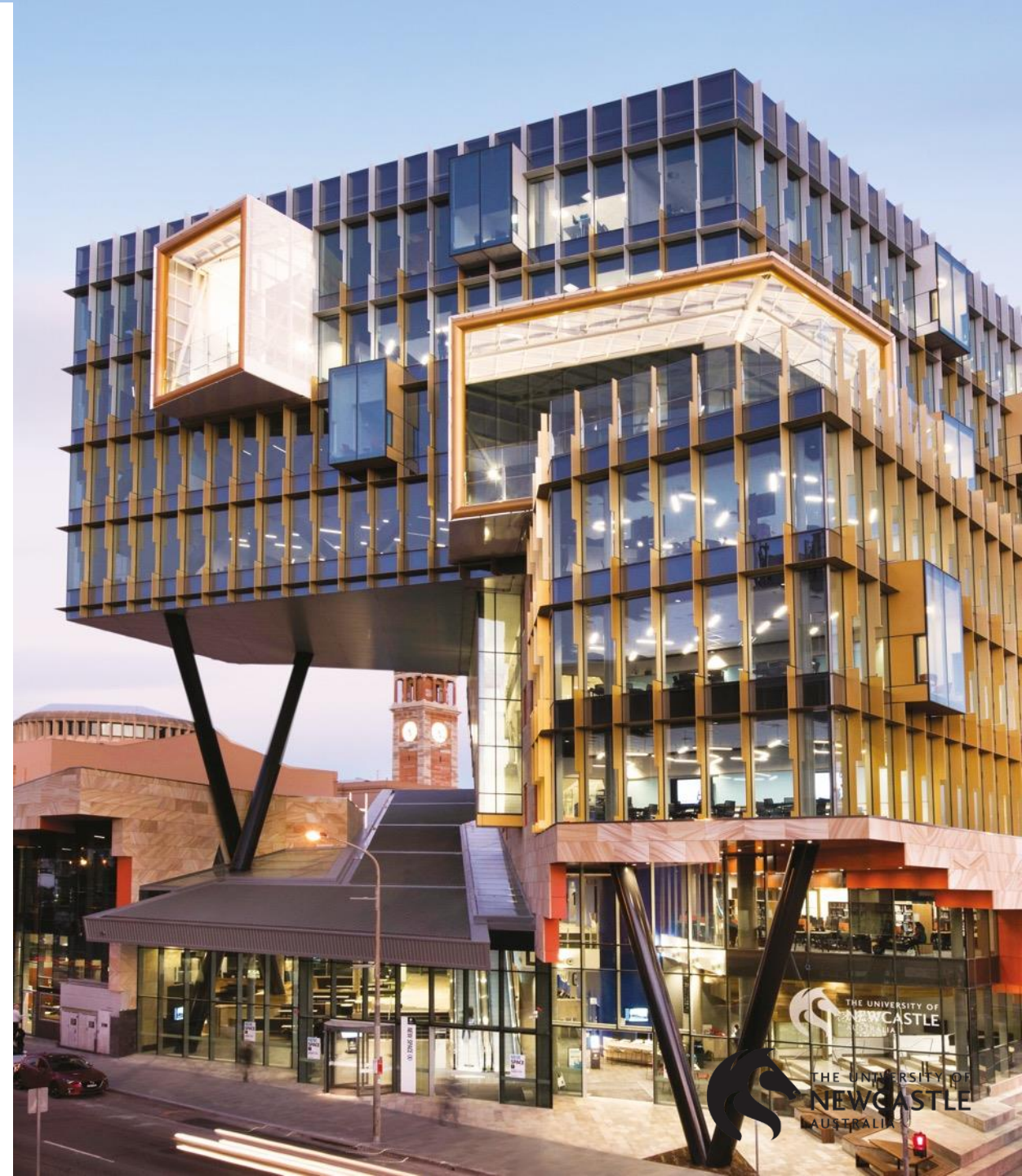
# Consistency and a 'hangout' space

- Same place and time each week
- The House
- Tea and Coffee
- Free food/snacks



# Challenges and Future Directions

- Limitations of Facebook
- Creating subgroups (e.g., HDR students, Sydney campus)
- Holiday activities
- Promotion to student's pre-arrival in Aus



# Questions

**Dr Emma Kerr**  
**Primary Prevention Counsellor**  
**Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**  
**[emma.k.kerr@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:emma.k.kerr@newcastle.edu.au)**



# Open Ended Feedback from Survey

**“It helps international students like me to get to know Newcastle and to know more friends!”**

**“More outdoor activities and single to mingle events”**

**“NUmates has helped me make friends and has hosted great events.”**

**“It’s been helpful to meet more people but I also think the conversations need to be led a little bit to force people to interact. “**

**“arrange some events on weekends”**

**“I hope it keeps running for years to come.”**