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# Defining the New Normal:

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# A Student Perspective

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## SONA UPDATE

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# SONA

# Intro

- \_Data collated from each of our SONA representatives at all institutions offering courses in architecture and/or the built environment in Australia.
- \_Primarily undergraduate students
- \_Informal discussions with Masters students at some universities to confirm data provided by undergraduate representatives.
- \_All data gathered was reviewed and considered for this presentation.

# Overview

- \_LMS training and effective use prioritised to enable communication and transmittal of information between academic staff and students.
- \_Communication between faculties and students has been consistent and clear.
- \_The requirement for lectures / tutorials to now all be recorded—when previously not all were—has greatly increased student accessibility and flexibility. This should be continued following isolation.

# Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

\_Financial grants and additional student hardship funds have been welcomed by students across Australia.

*Clarification of application documentation required*  
*Clearly communicated eligibility*

\_Digital lecture portals made available to students—with some featuring archived recordings—allows students to gain knowledge and retain a sense of community.

*E.g. RMIT Culture Hub, Deakin Air*

**Strengths**

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

\_Some universities have been providing additional Q&A sessions to students in addition to lectures and tutorials/studios.

Strengths

**Weaknesses**

Opportunities

Threats

\_Reductions in contact hours—despite the shift to virtual delivery—are unacceptable if fees have not been adjusted accordingly.

\_Mental health + wellbeing helplines (in addition to counseling services) need to be communicated clearly.

\_Student accessibility to academic staff is of increased importance.

*Emphasise proactivity of staff in responding, maintaining and providing feedback where necessary.*

Strengths

**Weaknesses**

Opportunities

Threats

- \_University-wide, and/or faculty specific emails sent on a regular basis to make sure students are 'ok' seem to be having little impact.
- \_Changes in expectations, especially concerning assessments and/or deliverables, must be communicated clearly and fairly to all students.  
*Greater oversight required.*

Strengths

Weaknesses

**Opportunities**

Threats

\_Mental Health + Wellbeing:

A faculty-based survey may be an effective way of properly gauging student morale and health.

*Additionally casual, informal conversation spear-headed by tutors and lecturers towards students may prove beneficial to students and academic staff.*

\_Quality of work:

Instead of reducing expected quality of submissions, consider reducing the amount of deliverables.



Strengths

Weaknesses

**Opportunities**

Threats

- \_Additional Q+A Sessions, or informal virtual sessions made available for students with their tutors and/or professors.
- \_Faculty should consult with student representatives, for example SONA representatives + additional student leaders to gauge student morale throughout the semester(s) in an attempt to address student concerns.
- \_Mentoring system to pair first year students with 3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> years.

Strengths

Weaknesses

**Opportunities**

Threats

\_Additional opportunity of interacting with students, sharing information etc. through third party online groups, for example facebook pages / groups, like MSD discussion board.

*Posting links / videos*

*Tutorials, links to software*

*Assessment changes, etc.*

*Informal communication has just as much, if not more value than formal faculty communications.*

Strengths

Weaknesses

**Opportunities**

Threats

\_Virtual Studio:

Splitting students off into smaller virtual groups when not receiving feedback from the tutor to use studio time effectively.

*Provides the opportunity for students to critique each other's work, enhancing their ability to think critically, simultaneously promoting student engagement and peer to peer learning.*

Strengths

Weaknesses

**Opportunities**

Threats

\_Super-Isolated International Students  
International students—paying considerably higher tuition fees—are really being affected by changes.

*Opportunity to provide virtual socialising  
Studio break-downs into smaller groups?*

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

**Threats**

\_Internet Access:

Students are dependant upon the stability of their internet connection to experience seamless tutorials / lectures. Ensuring these are ALL recorded and made available to students is paramount.

\_Accessibility to software:

Students are experiencing difficulty producing work of a previously expected level of quality with considerably less software available.

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

**Threats**

\_Loss of motivation

Although some may expect a loss of motivation to occur with the way COVID-19 has impacted the way we live, study and work faculties of the built environment are encouraged to explore means of boosting student motivation.



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