



Inspiring Hospitality and Well Being

Oasis is a welcoming and enabling community, open to all, contributing to personal and communal spiritual enrichment while promoting mutual respect and appreciative understanding of diverse religious paths and cultural traditions.

Oasis is...

A Centre

- a free¹, informal² and open place of welcome for students
- a 'home-away-from-home', offering free tea and coffee
- a complex of different spaces for student groups to meet
- a place of support, encouragement and connection

A Community

- committed to the Oasis vision and the practice of hospitality³
- a team of volunteers who act autonomously and informally as hosts, supported by a university-employed *Oasis Coordinating Chaplain* and *Oasis Administrative Officer*
- a complementary contributor within Flinders Student Services under the Head of Health, Counseling and Disability Services

A Collaborator

- encouraging informal well being initiatives within Flinders
- assisting other universities to create their own 'Oases' in their setting
- assisting community faith groups in appreciative interfaith engagement

An Auditor

- Creating a picture of informal well-being initiatives on campus

A Local, National and International Resource:

- **Telling:**
members of the Oasis Team sharing their experiences in the context of the expressed needs of the inviting agency.
- **Hosting**
workshops hosted by Oasis involving active participation by the participants on Oasis themes, such as well-being, faith friendly communities, cultural intelligence, interfaith ceremonies, celebrations and rituals, and how they may be constructed inclusively.
- **Doing**
creating and enacting public rituals in which others participate, contributing a learning experience and a resource for future use, development or adaption.
Eg, the annual *Order of Australia* 'Multifaith Australia Day Celebration'.

February, 2014

¹ ie. non-commercial

² ie. outside the formal curriculum

³ ie. 'the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.' Nouwen, Henri J.M., *Reaching Out* (Doubleday New York, 1975)

Background

Annual Report

Oasis 2013 - Inspiring Hospitality⁴ and Well Being⁵

<http://www.flinders.edu.au/oasis-files/documents/Brochure%20-%20Oasis%20final%20copy.pdf>

In 2013 we started with the idea that hospitality, understood as creating welcoming space, can be transformative. This was particularly significant in developing appreciative, respectful interfaith relationships among students, but is actually a universal means of building relationships and community and providing empowering support for students. (GB, March 2014)
<http://travellingchaplain.com/2014/03/30/oasis-and-the-proposed-new-student-hub/>

Entry in the Research Higher Degree Student Information Manual - Student Services section – Oasis (February 2014)

Spirituality and Religion

The Oasis centre contributes to meeting the spiritual and religious needs of the Flinders community.

An Oasis team, of religiously and culturally diverse volunteers, and various student groups who find a home there, offer various forms of prayer and meditation, seminars, study and discussion groups, as well as a friendship drop-in centre, open to all, and supporting well being on the campus. Muslim prayer rooms are located, and Jummah prayer conducted, in Oasis.

For more information refer to: www.flinders.edu.au/oasis

The Oasis Team is a diverse, responsive community of autonomous volunteers committed to the vision of Oasis.

Volunteers sign on to the Oasis Volunteers Engagement Form, complying with standards and protocols of Volunteering Australia.

Oasis Ambassadors are Flinders alumni who embraced the transformative dynamic of hospitality offered by Oasis while they were at Flinders as students, and now seek to live out the vision of Oasis in their lives. They are nominated annually by members of the Oasis Team.

⁴ Concept of **Hospitality** as making space; see quote from Henri Nouwen, page 5.

⁵ Concept of **Well Being**; see page 6.

The Culture of Oasis - *Boxes or Baskets?*

Box mentality

is a Western construct. It is a way of dealing with complexity and is characterized by fixed boundaries, regulation and bureaucratic accountability. Box culture promotes protectionism and is intent on eliminating risk.

Basket mentality

Baskets are more likely to be the dominant image for the 'life containers' of international students– individualized creations, hand woven from natural fibres. It is the culture they bring with them.

Oasis culture is characterized by 'basket thinking' – while recognizing and working within the 'boxed' culture of the university, Oasis is intent on flexibility, creativity, individuality and openness. Oasis values the colours of diversity and the risk of weaving into a yet to be determined unified beauty. Oasis enables and empowers a 'weaving culture'.

Fluidity

Oasis is free to act with fluidity between the structures of the University. In its interaction with the University, it values connection, collaboration, communication and creativity.

Oasis as Catalyst for Fostering Faith Friendly Communities

With Prof. Norman Habel, Oasis created a Charter for Faith Friendly Communities, that allows any community – school, institution, business, local council... – to declare itself 'faith friendly' in support of the principles of the Charter.

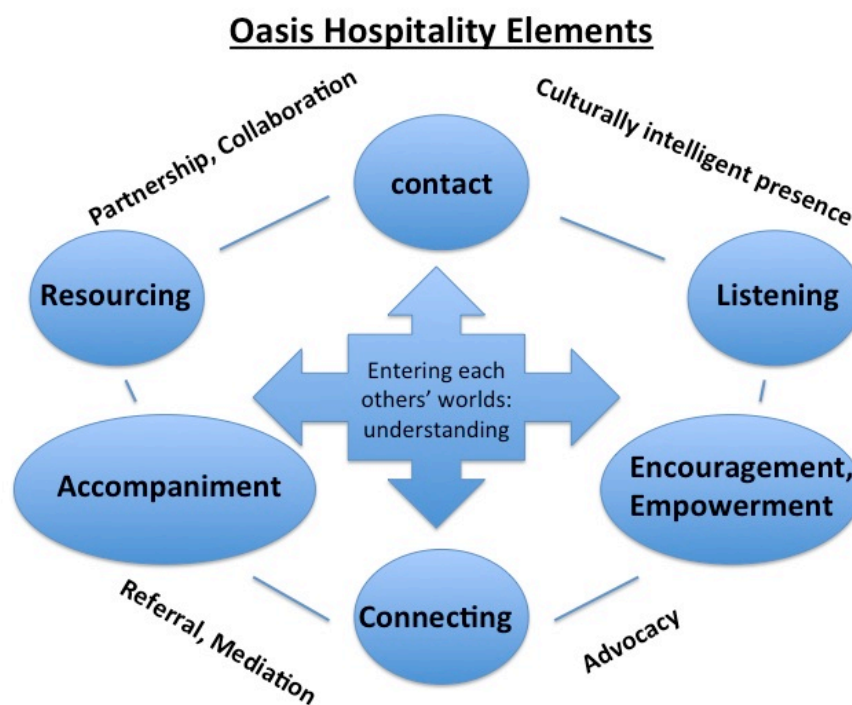
The Charter, for example, has been used by Woodville High School to establish norms of interfaith respect and understanding in the school, and for its Christian Pastoral Support Worker to take a multifaith approach to student support.

<http://www.geoffboyce.com/faith-friendly-communities/>

Hospitality as “making space”

Hospitality... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own.

Henri Nouwen. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements in the Spiritual Life.* (1975 Doubleday. New York) p 68



Well Being

The understanding of well being adopted by Oasis is consistent with those of *Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012-2013*, **Professor Martin Seligman** as outlined in *Building the State of Wellbeing – a strategy for South Australia*.
<http://www.thinkers.sa.gov.au/seligmanreport/> particularly pp 9 - 29

Seligman's Framework is

- **Positive Emotion**
- **Engagement**
- **Relationships**
- **Meaning**
- **Accomplishment**

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a method of problem solving that was pioneered by David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University in the mid 1980s.

To understand the basis of Appreciative Inquiry it is useful to look at the meaning of the two words in context.

- **Appreciation** means to recognize and value the contributions or attributes of things and people around us.
- **Inquiry** means to explore and discover, in the spirit of seeking to better understand, and being open to new possibilities.

When combined, this means that by appreciating what is good and valuable in the present situation, we can discover and learn about ways to effect positive change for the future.

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_85.htm

Appreciative Enquiry was first formulated within the context of business. Rather than continually identifying problems in the running of a business and then trying to solve them, Cooperrider decided to identify and building on strengths instead, giving the business a more positive culture.

The lessons of Appreciative Enquiry may be applied in Oasis with respect to conversations about difference.

Interfaith discussions may be conducted by a host disciplined to appreciate and value the opinions, beliefs, culture and values of the other, rather than looking for disagreements or making judgements by comparison. Such an approach is consistent with Nouwen's concept of hospitality as making friendly space for the other, and allowing the other the freedom to express themselves in their own way.

Oasis Planning Day December 4, 2013. Geoff's Notes.

I had thought that we would spend the first hour reviewing 2013, have a conversation with our guest for morning tea, FUSA Advocacy Officer, Sue about how we could work closely together with FUSA, and then spend the rest of the time mapping out 2014.

However, we got talking and the conversation didn't stop! I thought it was very productive. And the informality, very Oasis!

These were some of the themes I took from our time together. They seemed to have emerged from opposites.

Oasis works **informally** in a university environment institutionalized, commodified, hierarchical and in 'boxes'.

We are **voluntary**, so expectations tend to be negotiated rather than imposed.

As members of the Oasis Team we find ourselves 'being **ourselves**' as compared to work roles of the university - we work out of our own being rather than out of a job description we must fit into.

So we tend to be **nonconforming** rather than conforming, uncomfortable with living with 'hard' regulatory accountability expectations.

We act as **catalysts** within the system.

Our intuition is to connect communities who find themselves in a context of dislocation.

During the discussion we found ourselves returning to a conversation about how we saw Oasis with respect to the University – are we, following the tradition of the Religious Centre, a centre on the edge of the University; or is our task, now that Oasis has been administratively incorporated into the University, to **embed** ourselves into the whole university?

One aspect we may think about is the need for students to have **spaces for reflection**⁶. If students are formally immersed in their classes, where are the spaces for students to make sense of their learning, to make the intellectual connections that allow assimilation of various aspects of their formal educational experiences?

If Oasis is to be part of the proposed new Student Hub and if Oasis aims to embed itself into the University, perhaps the role of creating informal space that complements formal classroom learning may be a fruitful perspective for Oasis to consider. Oasis might be seen to be making a contribution to the University's trinity of "Teaching, Research and Community Engagement".

⁶ See Liminality p12.

Note: "Neuroscientific evidence argues that in order to function normally, our brains also need to be idle—a lot of the time. Authors, Oliver Burkeman and Andrew Smart explore the art and science of doing nothing". Philip Adams, *Late Night Live*, Thursday March 27, 2014

In a presentation “Learning How 2 Learn”

<http://www.slideshare.net/langwitches/learning-how2learn-change-rethinkamplify>

the following aspects were seen to be important and in need of greater amplification to enhance the provision of such informal learning opportunities:

- **Connection** – connecting disparate ideas or creating new relationships.

From the Oasis perspective, recognizing that everything is connected is central to a person’s spiritual health. Helping others make new connections creates new life opportunities – an important role Oasis already plays.

- **Communication** – whether on-line or face-to-face, communication is the medium that establishes connections.

The drop-in aspect of Oasis, support of the various users of Oasis and ISSU-Oasis English Conversation already make a contribution to communication between members of the University community.

- **Collaboration** – working on common objectives across administrative boundaries.

The ISSU - Oasis relationship is the best developed. If Oasis is to ‘embed’, we will need to adopt an attitude of collaboration across the university.

- **Critical Thinking** –

This is an area we need to work on. Steve Parker, who led our Oasis Retreat in 2012, and lectures in the area of Critical Thinking, may be able to help us here.

- **Creation** – free expression of ideas through various media

Oasis would therefore advocate for, or act collaboratively to support, equipping the proposed Student Hub with facilities such as a multimedia ‘corner’, an art room etc, creating opportunities for students to engage in creative activities.

These opportunities for informal learning supported by Oasis are contextualized by the Oasis ethos of friendship, care and support in which Oasis acts as host.

Recognition of the significance of informal, extra-curricular learning might take Oasis to a new level in the proposed new Student Hub. However, the University must first **recognise and value the significant place of informal learning as complementary to the formal learning process.**

The edited video below makes a case for valuing informal learning for the 21st Century student. The points I have highlighted in the video suggest how the Oasis paradigm might be extended to provide safe, sanctioned 'home' environments that foster informal learning, extending the successes we have achieved over the last 12 months.

(<http://travellingchaplain.com/2014/03/30/oasis-and-the-proposed-new-student-hub/>)
(GB, March 2014)

Home

Because 'home' (*a home away from home*) is so important for many students, both international and national, consideration by the architects might be given to how 'home' is understood and expressed among diverse cultures, to apply those principles in the creation of Oasis in the Hub. One paper that has examined some of these issues is:

<http://sarkissian.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Working-Paper-14-CULTURE-final.pdf>

(GB, April 2014)

Final Summary

We need to:

1. ask students about their needs
2. ask for feedback from International students
3. invite input from School of Social Work, particularly about communities
4. find an IT person, particularly for website
5. engage in cultural interchange with faculties – 'humanizing'.

Oasis – Inspiring Hospitality and Well Being. ***Empire Times, March 2014***

Imagine – being in the desert, surrounded by nothing but heat, dryness and roughness. You feel choked by all of it, and then suddenly, you find a cool fresh spring with shade to rest under. This is the vision of Oasis at Flinders: a place to take a break, to cool down and find refreshment.

But Oasis can be more than a pit stop. It is available for a range of diverse activities. Apart from the drop-in foyer, it comprises three spaces of different sizes that can be booked, or used casually by groups or individuals if they are not booked at the time.

Students mostly come in to Oasis to make themselves a (free) tea or coffee, or to heat up their lunch with our available microwave. Many also come to meet or make new friends, chatting and sharing stories. We also have a piano for our guests to play or practice music. Our space is also available for prayers and meditations. More often than not, students also come together and meet as a club or society within Oasis' space.

The University is committed to providing for the religious and spiritual needs of its community, and Oasis is the designated place for that. The Oasis Coordinating Chaplain, Geoff Boyce, ensures that Oasis is accessible and responsive to the university community. An Oasis team assists students or student groups, particularly encouraging appreciative understanding between those who see life differently. For example, Muslim Chaplain (Abul Farooque) and a Pagan Chaplain (Kylie Davis) not only provide support for students of those beliefs, but work within the Oasis team to support all students.

Some see religious activities taking place in Oasis, and think Oasis is only for religious groups. The reality is that this is only one part of what we have to offer. Overall, what we truly offer, regardless of background, is *space* - space for our guests to find their own space.

Apart from student activities, Oasis runs a few programs itself. One of our longest running ones is the English conversation classes for the spouses of international students. Run by volunteer Maureen Howland, and in partnership with the International Student Services Unit, we aim to help these spouses make new friends and practice English. We also try our best to provide a useful informal forum for finding answers to the many questions that arise when living in a foreign culture, and which may be impeding their enjoyment of it.

When you enter Oasis, you will probably be greeted and shown around by Lisa Chandler, the centre's administrator. Whether you need a listening ear, or advice from a motherly perspective, Lisa, with her smile, wisdom and patience, is always ready to help to the best of her abilities. She is also the go-to person if you need access to rooms.

You may also come across some of the volunteers who contribute to Oasis in different ways; feel free to chat with them and ask for their Oasis story.

Oasis is a welcoming and enabling community, open to all, contributing to personal and communal spiritual enrichment, while promoting mutual respect and appreciative understanding of diverse religious paths and cultural traditions.

For more information, or to book a room, you can contact us at (08) 8201 3530 or oasis@flinders.edu.au. We are located in the Mall near the Main Campus Plaza, right below Subway. Feel free to check out our website <http://www.flinders.edu.au/oasis/> and <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Oasis-Faith-Spirit-Community/253484784663693>

Liminality

The friendly, welcoming, unconditional space we provide when we offer hospitality could be described as **liminal space**.

Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr, makes the link between the “empty but friendly” space hospitality creates, and learning:

*It is when we are betwixt and between,
have left one room but not yet entered the next room,
any hiatus between stages of life, stages of faith, jobs, loves, or
relationships.*

*It is that graced time when we are not certain or in control, when
something genuinely new can happen.*

We are empty, receptive, an erased tablet waiting for new words. ...

*Much of the work of the biblical God and human destiny itself is to get
people into liminal spaces and to keep them there long enough to learn
something genuinely new.*

It is the ultimate teachable space. ...

*Liminal space will almost always feel counterintuitive, like a waste of
time and not logical or rational at all.*

*In fact, it must break your sense of practicality and function and move
you into the non-functional world of time.*

*Suffering and disease have that effect ... we enter into some kind of
vacuum or genuine detachment from our regular conveyor belt of life.*

*Remember, it is the things we cannot do anything about, the fateful
things, and the things we cannot do anything with, the useless things,
that invariably do something with us.*

*These are the only times when we are not at the steering wheel and
someone else can teach us and lead us.”*

Multifaith – Interfaith

1. Oasis recognizes and affirms **diversity**.

In religious terms, diversity translates to **multifaith**, literally, **many faiths** - the equal right of persons to their own religious integrity and its sustenance on campus, including those who profess no faith.

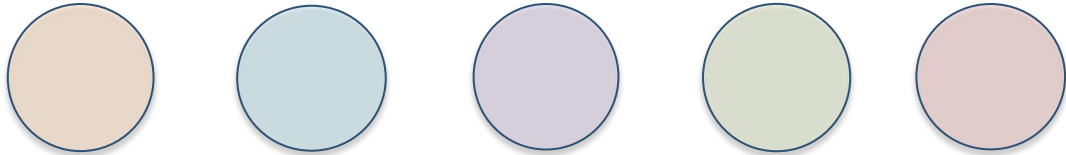


Fig1. Multifaith = Many Faiths of equal status

2. Oasis recognizes and affirms **pluralism**.

In religious terms, pluralism translates to **interfaith** – literally, **between faiths** - appreciative engagement between people of difference, each respecting each other's integrity - a necessity to sustain a civil society,

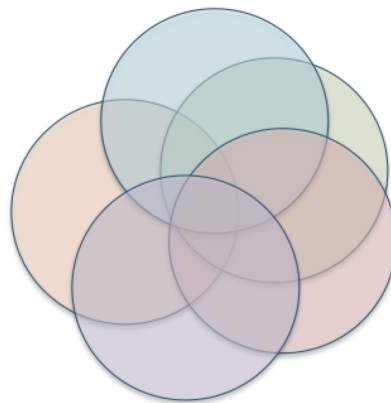


Fig 2. Interfaith = Between Faiths, engaging with each other while maintaining integrity

At the heart of this appreciative interfaith relationship with each other lies the intent of loving kindness, common to each of the world religions. This evolving recognition led initially in 2000 to a multifaith chaplaincy team, practicing an interfaith approach, which eventually led to the creation of Oasis in 2007-8.

3. Oasis recognizes and affirms that **religion and culture** are closely intertwined and difficult to separate from each other. Religions are multicultural, and the multicultural multi-religious.

Oasis therefore encourages multifaith, interfaith as well as cultural and intercultural activities and engagement.

The Implications of Multifaith, Interfaith, Cultural and Intercultural for Oasis in the Proposed Student Hub.

To achieve its interfaith role, all users of Oasis need to enter through one entrance into a reception/ drop-in space where they are welcomed by the Oasis Administrative Officer and/or members of the Oasis Team and where tea and coffee making facilities are available, as well as microwaves to heat lunches. This 'lounge' reception area should be designed for students to relax, mix and meet each other informally, in the presence of the Oasis Team.

Access to other meeting rooms, including the Muslim Prayer Rooms, should be made through this reception/drop-in lounge area. There should not be separate entrances to any rooms other than through the one reception area.

The office of the Oasis Coordinating Chaplain needs to be discreetly placed, in proximity to the reception desk of the Oasis Administrative Officer.

Food

The provision of kitchen facilities is essential. Food is at the centre of hospitality and cultural practice.

At Warwick University in the UK, which rates highly in European student satisfaction surveys with international students, there is a purpose built kitchen for each of the main world religions within their "Chaplaincy Centre" – a general industrial kitchen (Christian and Hindu), a kosher kitchen (Jewish), a Halal kitchen (Muslim) and a Vegan kitchen (Buddhist). Warwick University has recognized the cultural importance of food and has followed the logic of being genuinely multifaith. One student from each faith group undertakes a certified food-handling course and is responsible for the proper functioning of their kitchen, and food handling, within the structure of faith-based clubs and societies.

However, Flinders has chosen the interfaith path. Therefore we require one industrial kitchen, and the way it is used becomes a point of education for the users of Oasis. Use of the kitchen is restricted to food prepared for activities within Oasis only.

Oasis Connections to the Campus

To provide the conditions for Oasis to function well requires its space to be:

- Visible and accessible to students on campus
- Visible and accessible to visitors, from overseas and the wider community
- Easily accessible out of hours, with ready loading access
- Have ablutions on the ground floor (not on higher floors where leaking can occur)

- Soundproofed, as a high priority (from both directions and within)

External Spaces

- **External spaces** linked to the internal spaces of the proposed Student Hub are significant for some cultures and religions. An outdoor meeting space linked to Oasis would be highly desirable.
- I hope that consideration be given to externally **linking Yunggorendi with Oasis** to provide outdoor teaching space for Yunggorendi, native vegetation and an outdoor sacred ceremony site, which gives an unobstructed view to the western (sea) horizon. Consideration might also be given to a memorial site within this development.

This could be a separate 50th Anniversary Project. However, how such a link might be achieved might be considered as part of the Hub development.

- Consideration might also be given to a western-facing **balcony** area that extends from the Oasis Common Room
- It is important that wherever possible, Oasis spaces have **windows** that look out to the western sea horizon or on to Flinders' wonderful natural habitat.

Oasis Rooms

It is assumed that Oasis in the Hub will comprise, as a minimum, spaces that fulfil and hopefully improve the functions of the present spaces:

- **Reception/drop-in area**, with Admin Officer's reception desk and space for printer; lounge chairs, tea and coffee making and microwaving, and easy access to kitchen area nearby. Lockable reception storage (stationery etc).
- Large **kitchen** that links to the Common Room
- **Common Room**, size to meet needs of the projected number of male Muslim students who meet for weekly Friday Prayer. Lined and aligned carpet.

- **Meditation Room** (about the same size as the present one, but if possible, square). Soundproofing essential.
- **Private Lounge** that can be used by small groups, double as a confidential space or booked for massage.
- **Muslim Prayer Rooms** (about the same size as the present ones)
- **Coordinators office**
- **Storage Room** (about the size of an office).
- Instead of a shared Oasis Team office, a **wet area**, that can be used for art.