Study looks to boost numbers

New arrivals under-represented in higher education system

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MILDURA’S La Trobe University will be one of two regional locations used as a case study for a 12-month research project aimed at boosting the number of migrants enrolling in courses.

Starting next year, the La Trobe project – titled Raising participation of new migrant groups in low SES and regional communities – will begin, with researchers regularly visiting the Mildura and Shepparton campuses.

Senior lecturer in sociology at La Trobe University Anthony Moran said the project came about after researchers identified that new arrivals living in low socio-economic regional areas were under-represented in the higher education system.

“We’re interested in the way the two university campuses are engaging with their local populations,” Mr Moran said.

The research team will next year spend time in Mildura interviewing a selection of migrants and collecting data in an attempt to fill a gap that currently exists in the amount of information available surrounding migrant groups in Australia and their link to higher education.

“We’ll be talking to people from four focus groups: Year 11 and 12 students, youths aged between 15 and 24 who aren’t engaged in education or work, current university students, and potentially mature-aged students whose international credentials may not necessarily be transferable to Australia,” Mr Moran said.

Director of La Trobe’s Access and Achievement Research Unit Dr Andrew Harvey said the research would give universities the tools to develop plans to increase migrant participation.

“This project could change the way Australian universities recruit new migrants and develop models that encourage and reflect diversity,” Dr Harvey said.

“This will help us better understand and address the barriers that stop new migrants...
enrolling in higher education courses across regional, low socio-economic communities."

Dr Harvey said as regional communities became more diverse, a different approach was needed to encourage them to take up study.

“We know that university participation of new migrant groups is often low, which affects community involvement, campus diversity and economic productivity,” he said.

Researchers will work with the local La Trobe University campus, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council and various other organisations.

The project was allocated $144,460 Commonwealth Government funding as part of the 2016 National Priorities Pool.

Senior lecturer in sociology at La Trobe University Bundoora Anthony Moran says researchers will look at how the university engages with local populations.