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A guide to implementing the **First Year Experience** pillar of the USQ Academic Plan

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This guide has been designed to support the scholarly practice of university educators, in the context of supporting the first year learning experience of students. It is suggested that you treat this guide as a workbook, recording your notes and ideas along the way, to support your practice.

As an academic development resource, this guide:

- operationally defines key relevant terms (in plain language)

- unpacks University-wide strategies (describing how educators can apply and adopt approaches at a course and program level)

- presents authentic case studies of evidence-based good practice, to inspire ideas and possibilities.

The goal is to help you (as university educators) DO five things:

1. enmesh first year experience philosophies and approaches, and transition pedagogy, in the fabric of the curriculum and support for learning

2. reposition assessment to support students' transition into University

3. identify first year experience blockages, and resolve these challenges

4. design program experiences, through strategically mapping course experiences which support progression and transition

5. support students to see the connection, from year one, between their studies and their past, present and/or future careers.

There are four propositions, which underlay this guide.

1. Developing a feeling of belonging is essential for first year students.

2. Across the student experience, the most powerful agents, to support the transition into, and through, University are their university teachers.

3. For students to participate in initiatives designed to support their transition into first year, strategies must be interwoven in their regular coursework, such that the strategies are part of the fabric of the course and teaching (including through graded assessment).

4. A key factor in the value proposition of universities is to build personal capacity and therefore strengthen communities and societies to prosper, through widening participation and completion of university education.

The overall aims of the work described in this guide are to:

- improve the quality of the student learning experience

- increase the retention of USQ University students, focusing on the successful transition from first to second year

- widen participation and success of disadvantaged students in University

- support achievement, as reflected in appropriate grade distributions

- further develop the relevancy of University curricula and assessment

- lead the world forward through skilled graduates.

Contents

What is first year experience and transition pedagogy?

"**It is our contention … that it is within the first year curriculum that all students must be inspired, supported, and realise their sense of belonging; not only for transition, early engagement and retention, but also as foundational for later year learning success and a lifetime of professional practice**" (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010, p. 7).

Effective university approaches to improving the quality of the first year experience, through application of transition pedagogy, have the following characteristics in common.

☞ **1. The change is holistic, large-scale, comprehensive and thorough.**

The approach cannot be described as piece-meal, patchy, siloed or flash-in-the-pan. Rather than overhauling one or two first year courses, the whole program is strengthened. Relevant program level questions are:

• Which are our first year courses?

• What is our rationale for placing these courses in the first year?

• Does every student take these courses in their first year?

• How do they know to enrol in these courses (in their first year)?

• How do we transition from our first to our second year courses?

• How are our first year courses different from other years of courses?

• What message are we sending about our program to first year students?

• What is our teaching approach in our first year courses?

• Do we believe students learn differently in their first year?

• Is our assessment the same or different in first year? Why?

• Do we spend time teaching first year students how to be students? How?

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 1:

Choose the questions which resonated for you and begin to articulate responses.

☞ 2. **Initiatives are enmeshed in the fabric of the curriculum.**

Authentic changes are made to what is included in the curriculum, and the support for learning is extended to all first year students. Authentic and long-lasting change will not be achieved through clever student support for a few students or bolt-on student service initiatives.

All supports must be for, and married with, learning. For example, if data is tracked to identify which students are not accessing readings and/or interacting on StudyDesk, then this data needs to be carefully aligned with the curriculum and pedagogy.

Contact with the students, in an attempt to problem solve or motivate, should be made by the Course Examiner, and discussion should centre around the student learning experience. If phone calls are made to first year students to discuss their studies, their learning journey, their progress and their career ambitions, these phone calls should be made by the Course Examiner, and the conversation should be grounded in the curriculum and the learning experience.

☞ 3. **The key student matter is a feeling of belonging.**

Analysis for the reasons why first year students leave university usually come down to a feeling that they do not belong. This can take a number of forms, or in other words, be nuanced in a number of ways.

| I obviously do not belong at university because it is too hard and I am failing.

| I have no friends here, and I am lonely; therefore, I do not belong.

| I am an imposter and I will leave before they find me out. I do not belong here and they are going to realise.

| There is no one here like me. I am different. I do not fit. I do not belong.

| I thought that university would help me achieve my career goals, but I see no relationship between what I am studying and what we do at uni, and what I want to do in my career. I guess I don't belong at university.

| I don't like my courses. I thought this is what I wanted, but I don't. I guess I don't belong.

| My family was right. University isn't for people like us. We don't belong here.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 2:

Identify additional matters of belonging you have heard from your students. What can you, in the context of your program (your curriculum and teaching), do to change these iterations of not belonging, and/or how can you support learning in ways that students can feel belonging.

What is first year experience and transition pedagogy?

Three generations of FYE approaches

☞ 1.   The first generation

When the higher education sector first realised that a key problem, which required urgent solving, was an unsatisfactory first year university experience, the solutions were enacted at the extremities of the student experience (rather than within the curriculum and through their university teachers). Furthermore, while there were many projects, and they were often clever by design, they were disparate and disconnected. Examples are

> "strategies such as support services, learning support, orientation and peer programs, academic advising, social activities, [and] enrichment programs" (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010, p. 10).

Course Examiners were largely left out of (and not consulted about) these initiatives. This meant that their vast knowledge and experience within the context of the curriculum, and the particularities of their student cohorts, was ignored, and sometimes discounted.

The message was sent to students that university was primarily about something other than learning. As universities attracted more mature-aged students, who did not have time to engage in extra activities beyond their regular coursework, these add-ons were of little value.

☞ 2.   The second generation

While these projects helped some students, the impact was underwhelming. Too many students, overall, were not experiencing learning success and they were leaving university too soon to access the overall rewards.

The pendulum swung in the other direction, and saving the first year experience was conflated with *good teaching*.

In this generation of change, it was believed that improving assessment, alignment between learning outcomes and assessment tasks, clear instruction, the provision of student learning activities and responsive educators would magically make the first year experience all better.

These teaching initiatives definitely helped. However, this approach was too simplistic and ignored many of the complexities of first year experience (e.g. the importance of belonging and concurrent factors such as being first in family to attend university).

☞ 3.   The third generation – Transition Pedagogy

Universities who are addressing first year experience, through a third generation approach, are doing so through university-wide re-envisioning. There is a realisation that learning is at the centre of the student experience and supports are enacted as supports for learning. Strategies are enmeshed in the fabric of the curriculum.

The whole institution is included in, and contributes to, the comprehensive change. Students experience the change as enacted in the curriculum of their courses, and the experience is authentically consistent across their program.

> Strategies, such as those used as examples in the first generation, are still enacted, but **within and as part of, course-based experiences. Course Examiners partner with University staff, beyond the Faculties, as the drivers of the curricular transformation**.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 3:

Which generation do you think USQ is currently at, in its FYE approach?

> "**TRANSITION PEDAGOGY** transcends the silos of academic, administrative and support areas to enact a holistic, systematically-managed, vision for the FYE that is truly student-focussed. Because of the centrality of curriculum to this process and that curriculum is what all students have in common, irrespective of their diversity, and is within our institutional control, transition pedagogy can cater for heterogeneous cohorts, a fixture on the contemporary and future higher education scene." (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010, p. 14,15)

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 4:

There are six key principles of Transition Pedagogy. These principles are described in the table below. On the right side of the table, insert your ideas for addressing these principles in your program-based First Year Experiences (FYEs).

Transition Pedagogy Principles	Your ideas for your program-based FYE
Design Quality FYEs are enacted through intentional design of curriculum, as carried-out through courses and programs.	
Transition Students are supported to developmentally make the transition into and through the first year, into the second year and throughout their studies into graduation. The transition into first jobs after graduation, and from that job into what will become a multi-faceted career and lifelong learning, is also relevant to FYE, as explicit focus on careers and the later-transition from study to work, needs to start in the first year.	
Engagement To stay, and to feel like one belongs, a student must engage with the curriculum and its enactment. It is important to remember that engagement is a two-way commitment. The curriculum, and University teachers through that curriculum, must engage with students in order to compel students to engage reciprocally.	
Diversity Increasing student diversity is a key rationale for engaging in holistic, University-wide improvements to the FYE. Students with diverse cultures, backgrounds, contributions, ambitions, wants and needs, make it imperative that we have an intentional approach to quality education, from the beginning. Diversity gives students many reasons to need to leave university, making it imperative that we help them see why they need to stay and complete.	
Assessment Assessment is always critically important in education. What they need to do for how many marks, and how they will be graded, is almost always the first thing students will check, in a new semester. Assessment tasks are most often what stands-out in graduates' memories for years to come. Assessment is even more important to carefully manage in the first year. Students are coming to it new and fresh and seldom have a grasp of the expectations of their university teachers. Failed assessment tasks can quickly deflate any notion of student belonging.	
Evaluation Whereas assessment is a measure (and vehicle towards) student learning, evaluation is a measure of university staff's learning. It is important that we set goals, track data and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of our FYE efforts. How will we close-the-loop? What do we need to change? What are our students telling us that we need to do differently? Are the characteristics of our incoming student cohorts shifting? What do we need to change in our program-based FYE in response?	

Whose responsibility is a successful first year experience and transition pedagogy?

If success was to be expressed as a formula, it would be:

> **STUDENT + contextual factors + curriculum-enmeshed program-based strategies/supports = SUCCESS**

Among the university stakeholders, it is *educators* who have primary responsibility for students' and graduates' successful first year learning experience, and transition into second year, and through to graduation/career success. Supports for student learning need to be so enmeshed in the fabric of the curriculum and pedagogy that they cannot be separated out.

You are the best prepared and equipped to support the first year experience of your students, because:

- you have the most contact with students and have required/ timetabled schedules for interaction. It is you, who the students expect to learn from

- you know the discipline and therefore the curriculum

- you are across (and up-to-date) with the discipline-specific knowledge, skills, attributes and identity students need to develop for success

- you have a rich, applied knowledge, and skills, in identifying the characteristics of particular student cohorts, their needs and how to provide the nuanced learning supports.

In addition, research shows that contemporary students have busy lives and numerous responsibilities. If FYE supports and transition pedagogy is not enmeshed in students' regular courses and programs, it probably will not happen. Most students do not have the time to participate in extra, add-on components.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 5:

Reflect on your Course Examiner role, as successful first year experience driver. Is this a new perspective about your role? What makes you excited and/or nervous about this?

Key themes and statistics about first year experience in Australian universities

What percentage of Australian first year university students do not stay into the second year?

The number of first year students, across Australian universities and disciplines, who leave university during that year and/or do not come back for a second year (*attrition*) has stayed fairly constant for the past decade (Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowki, 2019).

The theory which garners the most support, across the literature, is that intentional, university and nearly sector-wide strategies, brought attrition down to its current level (which many educational theorists argue remains inexcusably high).

> **Across the higher education sector, average attrition rates of first year students is 19-20%** (Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowki, 2019).

In 2014, USQ's adjusted attrition rate was reported as 22.2% (Australian Government, 2017).

What are the key themes in the first year experience literature?

Academic orientation

University can be an alien experience, particularly for students who are the first in their immediate family to attend. There are numerous processes, systems and expectations to navigate.

Research shows that there is a difference in retention rates for students who commence university through college, bridging or pathway programs.

Sense of purpose

The hypothesis that students who attend university because – they do not know what else to do, because their parents want them to and/or because they are going along with what their friends are doing – are more likely to leave university, than students who have a clear career goal and/or love for learning, is supported by research.

Student identity

Lifespan approaches to psychology identify the late teens and early twenties as a key transitional life-stage in the context of emerging self-identity. That this development is concurrent, for many people, with the transition into university, introduces complex factors into the decision to stay or leave.

Furthermore, and overlapping, proponents of a multi-faceted model of self-concept believe that some self-identifiers are closer to the I/me and others are farther away.

Applied to first year experience, some people see their primary identity as student, and others (often mature-aged students with many other responsibilities) see themselves as student secondarily (and first as, for example, mother or worker).

Research shows that when the valence of student, in one's identity, is lower, they are more likely to leave university.

Academic application

There is conflicting evidence about whether students with higher high school marks (expressed as ATARs or OPs) are more likely to stay in university through and beyond the first year.

Engagement in learning

The meaning of student engagement is equivalent to that of engagement to be married. It means that people commit, that they spend time together and that they put effort into interaction.

Research shows that when students do not attend campus and/or do not spend meaningful time on course interfaces like StudyDesk, and when they do not submit assignments, they are more likely to leave university.

Key themes and statistics about first year experience in Australian universities

Comprehending and coping

Comprehension is a significant issue for students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and for students whose university teachers have strong accents. There is strong positive correlation between university studies and stress, and people have various levels of ability to cope. Exacerbating factors are disability, mental health, social isolation, and various other elements.

Perceptions of teaching quality

Some research shows that caring educators can make all the difference to whether students stay or go.

Educators who make themselves available to answer student questions, and are perceived as unintimidating, can go a long ways to shaking students' imposter syndrome, and helping them see that they belong in university.

Program satisfaction

There is a large body of research which shows a disconnect between what students think they are going to study, what they do as learning activities in university, and what actually transpires. There is a further disconnect between what graduates do in careers.

Sometimes, students do not like the program of studies, and perceive a gap between what they are studying and what they want to do in the workplace. This disillusionment can result in them leaving university.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 6:

Which of these themes resonate with observations of student cohorts in your program?

What are our obligations, as staff of a registered Australian higher education provider, in the context of First Year Experience (FYE)?

As described in the TEQSA (2020) *Good Practice Note*, the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 (HES Framework) includes two standards relating to retention improvement (which therefore strongly relate to FYE). These two standards can be read, interpreted and applied in the context of FYE for two reasons.

First, retention is often operationally defined (measured) in the specific context of FYE (do students stay to commence their second year of studies).

Second, there is a strong relationship between FYE and retention, in that research shows that attrition (the opposite of retention) is highest in the first year of study, and further, the reason there are TWO standards dedicated to retention is because false-starts to university result in loss of time, money, confidence and career advantage.

The two retention (and thereby FYE) related standards are:

☞ **Standard 1.3.5** which requires that trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of cohorts of students through courses [called programs, at USQ] of study be monitored by providers to enable review and improvement.

☞ **Standard 5.3.4** states that, at a minimum, registered providers must undertake

'review and improvement activities, [which] include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses [programs] of study, including:

a) analyses of progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates and, where applicable, comparing different locations of delivery

b) the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses [programs] of study.'

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 7:

The following questions have been designed to guide your discussion about whether your program-based intentional FYE is in compliance with the standards, and how you will grow and develop your FYE design to meet, and exceed, these standards.

Element of Standard	Are you currently meeting this Standard across your program, in the context of FYE? Provide a detailed description of what you currently do.	What is your improvement plan to meet and exceed this Standard across your program, in the context of FYE?
☞ **1.3.5a** Your program carefully tracks and reports trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of FY students.		
☞ **1.3.5b** Your program closes-the-loop, implementing improvements where the tracking reports indicate that there is need.		

Element of Standard	Are you currently meeting this Standard across your program, in the context of FYE? Provide a detailed description of what you currently do.	What is your improvement plan to meet and exceed this Standard across your program, in the context of FYE?
☞ **5.3.4a** Your program formally benchmarks trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of FY students against [an] Australian RUN university/ies, in the same discipline.		
☞ **5.3.4b** Your program formally reports the progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates of FY students, comparing FY students in Toowoomba, Springfield, Ipswich, Stanthorpe and Virtual Campus [whichever are relevant].		
☞ **5.3.4c** Your program closes-the-loop, making improvements, in the relevant different locations of delivery, as appropriate.		
☞ **5.3.4d** Your program maps the assessment methods and grading of FY students' achievement of learning outcomes for all FY courses across the program.		
☞ **5.3.4e** Your program closes-the-loop, making improvements to FY course assessment methods and grading across the program.		

The TEQSA (2020) *Good Practice Note* outlines eight approaches which make a difference in student retention, and therefore improves the first year experience.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 8:

The following questions have been designed to guide your discussion about whether your program-based intentional FYE is in compliance with these TEQSA-recommended approaches, and how you will grow and develop your FYE design to meet, and exceed, these approaches.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 8:

Element of TEQSA-identified Approach	Are you currently using this Approach across your program, in the context of FYE? Provide a detailed description of what you currently do.	What is your improvement plan to meet and exceed this Approach across your program, in the context of FYE?
☞ **1. *FY student preparation and admissions*** The appropriateness of FY students' preparation for higher education and how they are selected for admission.		
☞ **2. *Orientation and transition of FY students to program (and HE overall) study*** Orientation and transition programs are central to the success of students admitted to programs.		
☞ **3. *Clear and user-friendly enrolment processes*** The central factors in increasing the likelihood of retention are the nature and quality of a FY student's interaction with their academic institution (including, specifically within the context of their program).		
☞ **4. *Early identification of FY students at risk of discontinuing their studies*** The challenge to identify students in need of guidance in a timely way and respond with an appropriate intervention has become one of increasing refinement, customisation, and precision.		
☞ **5. *Program and career advice*** Every program needs to ensure that their students are given the opportunity for career planning and associated program advice, before and on entry to the institution, and as they require it throughout the first year of their studies.		
☞ **6. *Academic Support*** The provision of appropriate educational support, within programs, is necessary to optimise chances of FY student success and the likelihood of them remaining enrolled and completing qualifications.		
☞ **7. *A sense of connectedness*** University study can be especially stressful and alienating. A sense of belonging or connectedness, with its reliance on reciprocal relationships, is a basic human need which is central to success in HE. It must be intentionally fostered by/through programs.		
☞ **8. *Catering for different FY student backgrounds*** Completion rates are lower for Indigenous students, part-time students, external students, students over 25 years of age, remote students and students from low SES backgrounds. Intentionally designed FY program-based supports must be nuanced for each of these cohorts.		

What do we know from the national studies into the experience of first-year undergraduate students at Australian universities?*

* Conducted by the University of Melbourne, Centre for the Study of Higher Education.

The University of Melbourne has conducted five national studies, at five year intervals (Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowki, 2019). The first was in 1994.

The 2014 study included responses from eight different types of institutions. Institution delegates were asked to provide a random sample of 30% of the universities' first year students, a stratified sample of whom were surveyed.

In total (in 2014), 1739 surveys were completed, with response rates of 7-21% per institution.

What has changed between the 1994 and the 2014 results?

- More recent students feel that high school better prepared them for university.

- More recent students are able to more clearly articulate why they chose university.

- Motivation to study has risen only slightly.

- More recent students express much higher satisfaction with teaching and program quality.

- Indicators show that student friendships, beyond the classroom, were stronger in previous years and that more recent students' sense of belonging to the university community were somewhat lower than in previous years.

- There were a much higher percentage of students with lower high school averages (ATAR or OP) participating in the 2014 than in the 1994 survey (probably due to the uncapping of undergraduate places - *massification* - in Australian higher education). This research showed that these students are at higher risk of attrition.

Are students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds more likely to leave university in or after their first year?

Craft (2018) described the Australian government's policy initiative to widen participation in universities, operationalised, in part, by setting a target that 20% of undergraduate students were to be low SES by 2020.

One of the research questions, conducted through statistical analysis at a satellite campus, was whether attrition was more likely for low SES students.

The answer was **no**, in that there was no significant relationship between the factors.

Students' perspective on the first year experience

There is emergent research, from the students' and/or graduates' point of view, about the ways in which their universities are/are not supporting their first year experience.

Situated at a small regional campus of an Australian university, O'Shea (2015) conducted longitudinal research (interviews at four points across the first year) of 17 women, who were the first in their immediate family to attend university. This was the first university experience for all of them. Nine of the participants were high school graduates. Twelve were over thirty years of age. Ten had children.

O'Shea's findings confirmed those of prior studies, in that being first-in-family to attend university poses additional pressures and challenges. She wrote,

> For first-in-family students, the very act of arriving at university may be perceived as a radical departure for those closest to these individuals. Friends and family members may have little understanding of what the students are undertaking and may not be able to provide advice or support. The capital expected within the higher education institution may not only be alien to these students but perhaps be regarded as somewhat threatening by others. (p. 508)

O'Shea extended the knowledge base about first year experience, from the students' point of view, by posing two research questions:

☞ **what assisted students to persist in this environment**

☞ **how did they enact success.**

O'Shea categorised the results into **arriving**, **surviving** and **succeeding**.

Many of the research participants described the experience of **arriving** as one of *confusion*, *disillusionment* and *loneliness*.

In regard to *confusion*, it was difficult to find instrumental direction about pragmatic matters such as timetabling, enrolment and payments.

Disillusionment was primarily experienced in that new students expected their course examiners to be warm, friendly and supportive. Many students commented that this was not the case, and they felt intimidated and unwelcome to ask questions, or attend office hours, even when these hours were made available.

Research participants tended to operationally define **surviving** as getting through, or in other words, passing their courses. Over time, students tended to become more confident about their capabilities and academic prowess. This shifted their identity beyond the bounded context of the student role, which impacted their extended relationships, and in some cases, served as paving the way for other members of their families to attend university.

The dominant themes in O'Shea's discussion regarding the category of **succeeding**, extended beyond staying for year two to reflexively considering who they had become through the educational journey, and experiencing a realisation that they were not alone. For example, one of the participants was quoted as saying,

> "Obviously you see other people to me who have very similar stories. I am no different to anyone else out there and ... we are able to voice our opinion and say: 'Yeah, this is why we are here. This is how important it is" (p. 512).

O'Shea concluded that it is important for first year students to have these reflective opportunities to consider their evolving identities and community memberships. O'Shea powerfully wrote,

> "This research did not give this group a voice; all these women came to the research with strong voices, but with no listeners" (p. 515).

This suggests that universities have an obligation to open-up more venues and opportunities to listen.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 9:

Practical recommendations, which derived from O'Shea's (2015) research are presented in the table below. Beside these recommendations, there is space for you to insert plans for the strategies you and your colleagues (in your program) see as relevant.

First Year Experience Recommendation	Your notes and plans
Arriving	
☞ 1. Provide a practical Q&A guide, including such matters as timetabling, enrolment and payments, as an Announcement on every StudyDesk first year course site.	
☞ 2. Dedicate a Discussion Forum on every StudyDesk first year course site called *Ask Me Anything About University* (does not need to be course specific).	
☞ 3. As Course Examiner, send a personal email (addressed by name), with a friendly tone, to every student in every first year course. Acknowledge that starting university can be intimidating, confusing and lonely. Encourage students to email you if they have any questions about the course, the program or university overall. Remind them that there are no silly questions.	
☞ 4. Regularly summarise FAQs and their responses in announcements or Discussion Forum posts in your course-based StudyDesk site.	
☞ 5. Consider bringing mature-aged female students together for group-work activities in first year courses (including online).	
☞ 6. In addition to assigning Course Examiner roles by disciplinary expertise, consider allocating first year courses to those with warm, friendly, supportive dispositions.	
Surviving	
☞ 7. Explicitly create a practical resource, posted on the StudyDesk course site, with a title something like: *You CAN move beyond passing this course: Here's how.* Provide practical academic advice to students.	
☞ 8. Word the content of assessment rubrics, in first-year courses, with novice university students in mind. Ensure that assessment exemplars are provided and annotate the assessment with tagged comments, explicitly pointing-out the strengths.	
Succeeding	
☞ 9. Facilitate conversations, for example, through Discussion Forums about what it is like to be a first-year student. Link to blogs from first-year students.	
☞ 10. As a program, consider celebrating the achievement of completing the first year of studies. Celebrations could include one or more of: a first year completion digital badge (at the end of Semester Two first year courses), a personalised email to all program students who passed a given number of first year courses, or an online and/or on-campus party (pizza celebration, or dress-up open Zoom).	

What is the role of
University Student Success and Wellbeing team in the context of FYE?

At USQ, the *Careers and Employability* team, structurally sit within the larger *Student Success and Wellbeing* team.

This blog explains the relationship between FYE, student retention, attrition, success and employability.

- **https://graduateemployability.com/university-student-retention-attrition-success-employability-in-perspective/**

The *Careers and Employability* (C&E) team are available to support learning of first year students, through partnering with Course Examiners.

Together university educators and C&E staff can plan curriculum-enmeshed strategies to enable first year students to:

☞ set goals and strategies and make career decisions

☞ develop career management skills

☞ discover resources to support career decisions and actions

☞ develop a professional identity

☞ recognise the relevance of their studies.

The *Careers and Employability* team is comprised of:

- **Career Development Practitioners** [CDPs] who are available to partner with Course Examiners to plan curriculum-enmeshed approaches to support first year students to:
  - *Establish*: understand who you are and your study choice
  - *Explore*: your career options, prospects, career pathways.
- An **Employability Coordinator** who oversees the support of curriculum-enmeshed employability activities for first year students.
- **Industry Relationship Consultants** [IRCs] who design and deliver co-curricular employability events and programs such as Online Career Fair and mentoring programs.

In addition, the C&E team enacts co-curricular, career-related first year experience supports by:

- sourcing and advertising employment, scholarships, and awards opportunities
- facilitating professional networking and LinkedIn support
- delivering events, such as online career fairs, employer and student webinars, networking events and recruitment. simulations
- helping students with applications, resumes, cover letters, selection criteria and interviews
- providing monthly Career Outbound newsletters to students
- delivering the Career Insights Radio Series.

The C&E team also supports University educators to further build and extend Industry relationships, through:

- industry and alumni mentoring
- industry placements, work experience and workplace visits
- connecting industry with students
- supporting WIL by sourcing employers and preparing students
- arranging mentoring by industry professionals and alumni.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation (the Ignition Project) Senior Project Coordinator

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Senior Project Coordinator is available to work in partnership with University educators to encourage first year students to develop their entrepreneurial, intrapreneurial and design thinking skills. This can include the delivery of curriculum-enmeshed:

- workshops and webinars
- the Entrepreneurship 101 series
- the Business Pitching competition
- USQs Entrepreneurship and Innovation website. **https://www.usq.edu.au/entrepreneurship**

Websites to explore:

- **https://www.usq.edu.au/careers**
- **http://accesshub.usq.edu.au/students/login**
- **https://www.usq.edu.au/current-students/career-development/careers-in-curriculum**

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 10:

Do you have an upcoming program or school meeting or PD, where you might invite the *Student Success* team to attend, to partner in the design and development of learning and teaching for strengthened first year experiences and transitions?

If not, identify a date and time to co-create some bespoke PD. What are the aims of the session? Who will be invited to roll-up-their-sleeves and contribute?

Adopting and applying *FYE Strategy* to your teaching of courses and programs

This next section provides guidance and ideas as to how you might adopt and apply FYE and Transition Pedagogy in the context of your teaching.

As experts in the situations, characteristics and cultures of your student cohort, and in your curriculum, discipline and industry/ies, it is up to you to decide which approaches will work in your courses and in your overall program.

You do not need to action each, or all, of these teaching (and FY learning support) approaches.

Embedding employability and careers for FY students in courses and programs

Initiatives	Ideas for Application	Your Notes
Include alumni careers as part of curriculum.	As part of your curriculum, include alumni interview videos (filmed in industry) to showcase aspects of professional life in the field so that FY students can begin to explore possible career paths and can see the relevance of their learning to careers.	
Plan Career Development Learning as course-based student activities.	Include industry-related activities in your FY courses to engage FY students with future careers, i.e. case studies, mock job interviews, negotiation.	
Incorporate digital capabilities as student and as future graduate.	Provide students with a practical guide to digital interfaces, technologies and associated activities which are critical to success as a FY student and in their future careers. Design applied activities, including within graded assessment.	

Supporting through infrastructure and analytic data

Initiatives	Ideas for Application	Your Notes
Generate and harness data to provide actionable insights to support FY student success.	Use data to help understand FY learners and the measures of *success*, *at risk* and *engagement*, that are specific to this cohort. For example, did more frequent participation in Discussion Forums correlate with higher grades?	
Generate and harness data to provide actionable insights to support student success.	Using MyOpinion, Check-in or other evaluation data for the same or similar courses in your program, identify which aspects of the learning experience FY students either appreciate or do not find useful.	
Use LMS analytics for early identification of at-risk FY students.	Analyse LMS analytics to identify students who may not be displaying learning behaviours that lead to success (i.e. participating in forums; interacting with staff and peers; accessing required materials on time).	

Designing for Diversity

Initiatives	Ideas for Application	Your Notes
Design opportunities, in each FY course, for students and staff to become aware of the diverse range of students in your cohort.	Implement a *who are we* poll or survey at the beginning of the FY course, then share the results. i.e. rural/regional/urban, full-time/part-time worker, parent or carer, school-leaver, first-in-family.	
Refine curricula to match cohort diversity.	Encourage working FY students to reflect on their professional experience for assignments Provide opportunities for international FY students to use case studies from their home cultures in assignments.	
Identify students' entering knowledge and skills.	Embed activities in the first weeks of semester which will help identify disparities between different FY students' entering knowledge and skills. An anonymous survey or online poll will allow students to report on their current familiarity with academic skills such as academic integrity and LMS use.	

Enhancing first year student engagement

Initiatives	Ideas for Application	Your Notes
Embed opportunities for structured interaction.	Embed activities for FY students to work collaboratively so they can get to know each other and build their sense of belonging to the cohort and to the University, i.e. debates, interviews, group discussions, online forums, vlogs.	
Connect course activities to students' previous experiences.	Include activities that help FY students make connections between their previous education/life experiences and course content: i.e. • what are three pieces of professional writing you have done? • which of these graduate attributes have you had a chance to develop through your work or life experiences?	

Strengthening assessment and feedback

Initiatives	Ideas for Application	Your Notes
Provide early formative assessment and feedback	Design a formative assessment item or an assessment-related activity early in the semester and give FY students feedback as quickly as possible so that FY students get a sense of their progression in the course, and staff have an evidence base for targeted supports for learning.	
Scaffold assessment	Clearly identify the skills needed to complete each assessment item successfully, and ensure that these skills are introduced and supported within the course. (i.e. For this assignment you will use the skills of reflection and academic integrity. Click here for a guided reflection activity...)	
Ensure consistency of assessment language, criteria, and types across the program	Create a program-wide glossary of assessment language, i.e. what is a *poster*? What does *reflect* mean? Are quotations included in word counts?	

Definitions

(from Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017).

☞ **Attrition**

There are two attrition rates - a **normal attrition** rate and an **adjusted attrition** rate.

• The **normal attrition** rate is calculated from a count of students commencing in courses and institutions in one year then comparing the number who enrol in the same course at the same institution for their second year of study.

• The **adjusted attrition** rate is able to track individuals through their CHESSN and accounts for persons changing course and/or institution.

The difference between the measures is that the normal attrition rate is higher as it includes students who change course and/or institution; whereas the adjusted attrition rate only counts students as withdrawing if they leave higher education.

☞ **Retention**

The retention rate is conceptually the opposite of attrition in that it measures the proportion of students who remain in study.

• As with attrition, there is a **normal retention** rate and an **adjusted retention** rate.

• The adjusted retention rate is examined for the same reasons as the adjusted attrition rate.

☞ **Success**

The success rate is a different concept to attrition and retention, in that it measures units of study passed by commencing students.

However, the success rate is highly correlated with the **adjusted attrition** rate and **adjusted retention** rate.

This high correlation should be expected as a major factor in a student's decision to discontinue is poor academic performance.

References

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Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2020). *Good practice note: Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education.* Melbourne, VIC: Author. https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/good-practice-note-improving-retention-completion-students-v2-0.pdf?v=1581913481

FYE Checklists

(to review and guide your program practice)

Diversity questions	What am I doing already? What else can I do?
What are the diversity characteristics of your first-year cohort? (first in family, low SES, rural, mature-age, international)	
What are the attrition patterns for your program's diverse FY demographic groups?	
What supports are available within your School or the University for specific equity groups? How do you enmesh these supports into curriculum, or as co-curriculum?	
How will you ensure that all key stakeholders are aware of your cohort's diversity characteristics and available supports? How do you bring these supports for learning into your courses and programs?	
How can you draw on the diversity of your cohort as a learning resource for all students?	

Course design questions	What am I doing already? What else can I do?
How will you clearly explain to students which program graduate attributes and learning outcomes your FY course will help them to achieve?	
How will you clearly explain to students how your FY course's assessment and activities can develop their employability?	
Have you provided students with guidelines detailing how much time should be spent on specific aspects of their academic work (i.e. reading, preparing assignments, engaging in discussion)?	
What are the opportunities for FY students to work collaboratively in order for them to learn from each other and develop their sense of belonging? How will you support collaboration?	
If your FY course serves various programs, what activities will you include to help students identify connections between your course and their program?	
What physical and/or virtual spaces have you prepared to enable FY students to interact?	
How have you enmeshed employability into your curriculum?	
What are the assessment due dates for other FY courses in your program? Is it possible for you to coordinate with other FY Course Examiners to avoid duplicating due dates?	

FYE Checklists

Engagement questions	What am I doing already? What else can I do?
How will you and your team engage with your FY students? Will you have online drop-in consultation times, can they telephone you, can they email you and if so how quickly will you respond, how often will you monitor and respond to Discussion Forums, are you available after hours?	
What strategies will your FY teaching team use for engaging shy students and students from diverse backgrounds in learning activities?	
How will you provide students with opportunities for FY peer support, i.e. meet-up? How will you bring this in from the periphery to the curricular heart of learning?	
How have you designed course assessment and activities to draw on students' personal and professional experiences?	
Are there any relevant FY-level co-curricular activities i.e. industry guest lectures, workshops, student committees which might add to your students' course-based learning experiences, as part of curriculum?	
How can you support all of your students to develop a sense of belonging – to the FY course, the program, and to University culture?	
How might you build cohort belonging and identity through course special events or celebrations?	

Assessment questions	What am I doing already? What else can I do?
How will all FY students in your Course get feedback on their learning in the first three weeks of their first semester? What kind(s) of feedback will you provide?	
Are your assessment language, criteria, and types consistent with those in other FY courses across the program (i.e. are students and staff provided with clear definitions of terms such as *report*, *analyse*, and *poster*?)	
How have you identified and scaffolded the FY-level skills required to complete each assessment item and/or course activity?	
How do your FY assessment items build a foundation for the advanced skills required by the end of the program?	
What supports have you put in place around the first assignment (i.e. exemplars, peer review sessions, opportunity to submit a draft, drop-in assignment sessions)?	

FYE Checklists

Evaluation & Monitoring questions	What am I doing already? What else can I do?
What does MyOpinion, Check-in or other evaluation data for the same or similar courses in your program tell you about aspects of the learning experience that FY students either appreciate or do not find useful? How have you closed-the-loop?	
What is your strategy for identifying and supporting FY students who might be at risk of not acquiring the academic and discipline skills relevant to your course?	
How will you use LMS analytics for early identification of at-risk students?	
How have you responded to student and peer evaluations of previous iterations of your course?	
What data do you need to thoroughly evaluate the impact of your FY course (on student learning)? How and when will you collect it? How will you close-the-loop?	

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