

Nuts and Bolts

Outline of session: Swimming for new horizons: targeting retention and success for future teachers

Presenters (Dr Lesley Ljungdahl & Dr Damian Maher) (10 mins): Introduction of issues of retention and success in first year students at University of Technology, Sydney, Kuring-gai Campus. This outlines early research on identification of challenges faced by undergraduate BEd and postgraduate BTeach students. Responses to questionnaires indicated problems of transition to university, time, income, transport and engagement. The presenters will give the recommendations from the early research and references to relevant literature on the first year experience.

Group discussion (10 mins): Common themes and student comments from questionnaires on issues such as:

- transition to university
- social engagement on the campus
- demands of tertiary study
- managing study, work and home commitments

Discussion of similar issues experienced at own institutions focusing on barriers, affordances and comparisons. A discussion of which initiatives work best at your university and what you would like to implement in the future. The groups report their ideas/discussion (5 mins)

Presenters + whole group discussion (5 mins): Drawing together of the ideas of participants. Discussion of successful implementation at institutions.

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of pre-service teachers about their university experience with a view to finding and implementing strategies which would maximise their success and retention. The target group is drawn from first year Education students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary Education) course and postgraduate students in the Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary) at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). Data from questionnaires and focus groups highlighted issues such as adjustment problems, juggling family responsibilities with studies and the pressure of study workload. This study underscores a need to increase student engagement and address individual student learning needs at university through a multi-faceted approach which includes: communication about existing university services; collaboration between professional and academic staff; learning academic skills; mentoring services; programs

for information and technological literacies; access to personal counselling; and the facilitation of social networks.

Swimming for new horizons: targeting retention and success for future teachers

To swim for new horizons is a daunting prospect for students who need new coping and academic skills to reach a goal of university graduation. University staff and services can play a central role in supporting students as they navigate a new discourse. They confront new challenges in understanding academic discourse; meeting the assessment requirements of subject content; developing learning strategies; and making social relationships. This study focuses on i) the perceptions of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) and Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary) courses designed to prepare future primary and secondary school teachers and ii) the informal and formal support offered to students while they complete their degree.

Background

Universities have a commitment to equity and thus to the widening of participation in the courses they offer. Improving educational outcomes assists the whole community. The participation of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) communities is a growing need as an increasing number of students stay at school to complete six years of secondary schooling and have the expectation of university attendance. Currently, at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), SES statistics on participation and attainment are primarily based upon the postcode of the student's home address through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Educational and Occupational indices.

Context

A major aim of the study was to identify barriers to success which contributed to attrition rates and the different forms of academic and centrally administered support which could assist students. Some existing strategies appear to be working better for high SES students. Practical strategies which students reported assisted their success were class sizes and small student cohorts and tutorials which allowed both discussion and active participation.

Literature review

Navigating the transition to university is difficult when students are introduced to new university discourse and are unaware of existing services (Lawrence, 2003). Research on student engagement, curricular reform and the exigencies of study and work has demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of success and retention of university students (Kift 2005, 2008, 2010; Nelson, Kift & Creagh, 2007). The research of Tinto (2006, 2009) has shown the importance of the first year experience and this is further validated by Wilson (2009) in the interrelationship of institutional, programmatic and personal interventions which can assist student retention. Kuh (2008) proposed a suite of 10 high-impact educational practices aimed at maximising inclusion of students from a variety of backgrounds. These include the establishment of seminars held regularly among first year students and staff, common, cross-curricular themes of study, collaborative assignments, pursuit of diversity- and global-learning, and service learning (Kuh 2008, 9-11).

Students who have a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD) have many advantages through this breadth of skills and interests but these might not be recognised as part of the currency of 'University tender'. Moreover, English language problems may prevent these students from achieving deserved success at university (Andrade, 2006). While students enrolled in the Education courses had a score of 7.5, the language demands of the classroom and the discourse of academic writing presented severe difficulties.

Methodology

The study used questionnaires and focus groups as methodological tools. A total of 244 students participated (n=129, Bachelor of Education course; n=104, Bachelor of Teaching).

Findings & Discussion

University and school experiences are clearly dissimilar in many respects so that some kind of culture shock is to be expected. As Vickers, Lam and Hinckley (2003) have shown, many factors can impinge on students' engagement with their studies e.g. part-time work, the nature of the course, the language background, and the financial constraints. In the responses to the questionnaire and the focus groups, individuals could offer contradictory comments and this was highlighted by the difference in the background of the cohorts.

Adjustment to university

The transition to university was challenging because many first year students who were not prepared for the level of independence required and the difficulties attached to managing their study workload. The lack of preparedness and unrealistic expectation of university are substantiated by other researchers (Christie, Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2011; Dalziel & Peat, 1998). The new discourses of university take time to understand and to assimilate.

Academic discourse

With increasing numbers of students entering university from a myriad of backgrounds, knowledge of fundamental academic writing skills can no longer be assumed.

Assessment practices

Many students found difficulty with assignments: in structuring their time, meeting the standard required, and scheduling group meetings.

Balancing study, work and family responsibilities

The differences between the BEd (primary) and the BTeach (secondary) were apparent in some areas. For example, the younger students were more interested in social engagement and more critical of transport and travel problems. In comparison, many of the BTeach students did not place emphasis on 'engagement', simply wanting to complete the program and still make time for their family and work needs. Balancing responsibilities was demanding for many students: *It's hard being a mother and wife, and managing the home. It makes it impossible to have paid employment, however, I love the*

challenge of uni and I am confident in the long term having the degree will benefit not only me, but, my family as well.

Use of technology

Acquiring skills with technology can be hampered by technical limitations, access problems and limited instruction in its use (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009).

University services

There is a broad range of student services at UTS to assist students in areas such as careers, counselling, financial assistance, health, housing, multi-faith chaplaincy, and special needs. In addition there are specialized student programs such as U-PASS (a peer assisted program for selected subjects), Peer Network (voluntary students who assist with orientation and other events), First Year Experience (resources and videos) and BUILD (Beyond UTS International Leadership Development).

Recommendations

Findings from the study indicated that improvements could be made in many areas which might benefit students. Initiatives to support student inclusion, retention and success include:

1. Improved communication to students through text and online formats to enhance existing support structures e.g. academic literacy support, peer tutors, mentors, etc.
2. A wide-ranging mentoring program to provide support for incoming students
3. Development of web resources (electronic media and interactive technology) to communicate more clearly with students e.g. utilization of e-books and textbooks
4. Appropriate pedagogy within the curricula to support low-SES students and those 'at risk' students
5. Clarity and consistency of layout of first year subject outlines to assist understanding
6. Closer identification of 'at risk' students so their needs can be addressed early
7. The strengthening of social engagement and knowledge of students through group work, particularly in first year semester one subjects
8. Opportunities for informal social engagement of student/student and student/staff
9. A re-orientation session for first year students towards the end of the first semester
10. Visits to high schools by academic staff to understand the background of future students and their schools e.g. links with school counsellors.

Conclusion

From the observations of the participants in this study there is a need to increase student engagement and address individual student learning needs through a multi-faceted approach which involves all stakeholders. Universities have an important role in helping students as they 'swim for new horizons'.

Selected References

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Future teachers' readiness to the innovative activity is generated in the process of integrating innovation in search, in experimental work, which provides an optimal environment for continuous creative comprehension of reality and leads to the establishment, development and improvement of their skills and professionalism (Kalybekova, 2009). This work can only be successful if there are followed the pedagogical conditions: - Innovative trends in education must be adequately reflected in the objectives, content, methods and organizational forms of teacher training; - A model of It helps the teacher to choose the materials, adapt the activities to student's needs, be prepared to possible problems. An effective lesson plan has three basic components; aims and objectives of the course, teaching and learning activities and, assessments to check student understanding of the topic. Step 1 " Identify the aims of the lesson. First, identify the type of the lesson: skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) or systems (vocabulary, grammar, functions, pronunciation). Then according to the outcomes you want to achieve by the end of the lesson identify the main aims, sub-aim Teachers who wait to get vaccinated after the school year ends will be allowed to return only when clinical trials on the vaccine are completed, assuming a position at the school is still available. Mrs Centner also repeated a false claim of vaccinated individuals affecting unvaccinated people, saying three women in the school's community had their menstrual cycles "impacted after having spent time with a vaccinated person". There is no scientific evidence for these claims. None of the coronavirus vaccines approved for emergency in the US have been linked to infertility, miscarr