



# Achieving a successful transition to higher education

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The University of Sydney, Australia



Australia's oldest university

- 48,000 students

of which

- 9,000 international students
- 16,000 commencing students
- 2,500 academic staff

Seeks to attract the brightest and the best students  
and staff

# Student impressions of differences between secondary school and university

- Academic
- Administrative
- Geographic
- Personal

## 1995 national survey of first year students

- Only half the students found their subjects interesting
- Only 53 per cent thought the staff were enthusiastic about the subjects they were teaching
- Less than half said that their teachers were good at explaining things
- Only 41 per cent thought there was a positive attitude towards learning amongst their fellow students
- Well over a quarter worked in isolation from their peers and were not interested in extra-curricular activities
- About 30 per cent were negative enough during the first semester to seriously consider deferring

## Targets – university level

- Develop new orientation programs and a student-at-risk program based on international best practice.
- Implement program that enhances the first year experience for students

## CHALLENGES: How to...

- reduce the difference between school and university experiences?
- ensure experiences of all students in the first month of university are positive?
- encourage staff to focus on how students progress in their academic training?
- have staff take more responsibility for the student learning experience?



**The University of Sydney**

- Students will be familiarised with the University's physical environment, academic culture and support services
- Students' sense of purpose and direction will be developed by promoting their understanding of what their courses involve; where their course will lead them; and what their learning in those courses will involve
- Students' engagement with the University, including with their peers, will be promoted and supported
- Students' learning will be enhanced by developing their knowledge and skills, including generic skills, and by taking into account students' diverse backgrounds and abilities

## Ideas for strategies...

- Pre-enrolment and Enrolment strategies
- Orientation events
- Teaching strategies
- Teaching organisation
- Study skills advice and assistance
- Provide advice according to student's needs
- Assessment strategies
- Social events



## **Plan for First Year Academic Orientation and Transition – Faculty of Rural Management**

**Objective 1: To familiarise students with the University’s physical environment, academic culture and support services**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1.1 Introduce students to physical environment	<p>During ‘O’ Week students have guided tours of the Campus organised by third year students.</p> <p>Distance education students receive printed materials and can attend a special ‘Orientation Day’.</p>	<p>‘O’ Week Coordinator and third year students</p> <p>Academic Skills Advisor and Lecturers</p>	FRM is located on an extensive rural campus which includes a farm, vineyards, residences as well as the Faculty buildings. Students appreciate the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the physical environment.

Full plan is available at:

[http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/FYE/initiatives/facultyPlans/FYE\\_rural\\_plan.doc](http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/FYE/initiatives/facultyPlans/FYE_rural_plan.doc)



## Sydney Welcome Orientation and Transition



SWOT is the Sydney Welcome Orientation and Transition program designed to help all new students to get to know the University and its services.

Faculties, the Library and central student support services work together in the SWOT Program to assist students become familiar with the University.

# Go to Uni quiz

MOTIVATION	WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'
I am convinced I made the right choices in my course	'Trading Places' workshop Careers Centre
I generally feel in control of things	'Succeeding at Sydney' workshop 'Strategies for Successful Learning' lecture
I can cope with stress	'Coping with Stress' workshop

<b>FRIENDS &amp; CONTACTS</b>	<b>WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'</b>
I make friends easily	'Friends and Contacts' workshop
I have no worry about getting involved in Uni life	'Succeeding at Sydney' workshop
I know where to get support for personal crises or problems	Counselling Service
I can take responsibility for my own learning	'Strategies for Successful Learning' lecture

ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS	WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'
I know what 'critical thinking' means	'Developing Critical Thinking Skills' lecture
I can express myself well in spoken English	Learning Centre workshops
I consider my written English to be adequate for uni work	'Successful Essay / Report Writing' lecture Learning Centre workshops
I know what 'academic honesty' means	'Collaborative Learning' lecture
I can take good notes when listening	'Lectures and how to use them' lecture

<b>ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS</b>	<b>WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'</b>
I can take good notes when reading	Learning Centre workshops
My maths skills are adequate for my course	Maths Bridging courses in February
I feel comfortable negotiating email and the Web	Computer Access Centres
I have good word-processing skills	Computer Access Centres
I know how uni libraries work	Library tours & information sessions

GETTING ORGANISED	WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'
I am good at getting started on things I have to do	Counselling Service
I am good at managing my time	'Strategies for Successful Learning' lecture Counselling Service workshops
I can maintain the balance between study, paid work and having fun	'Succeeding at Sydney' workshop Counselling Service workshops
I can pay for my textbooks and course requirements	Financial Assistance Office information sessions

<b>COMMUNICATING</b>	<b>WHERE TO GO IF YOU SAY 'NO'</b>
I will feel at ease giving an oral presentation to a group	Learning Centre workshops
I can contribute effectively to a team project	'Collaborative Learning' lecture
I feel confident about approaching academic staff	Find your First Year Coordinator
I know where to go for information	University website 'Friends and Contacts' workshop University Calendar and Student Centre



## Transition checklist for lecturers of first year subjects

- Be enthusiastic about your subject: students say that this makes a great difference in how they engage with their studies.
- Smile as you introduce yourself, and provide contact details - phone, email, office consultation hours, and let students know how they should address you.
- Take a few minutes at the start of class to allow students to introduce themselves to a person nearby, maybe asking each other why they chose your subject.

## **Transition checklist for lecturers of first year subjects (continued)**

- Suggest they have a coffee with some of the group in their next free hour, and use the time to talk about the subject.
  
- Show that you care about students settling in smoothly by offering tips on how to avoid queues for books, getting to locations, getting help when needed etc.
  
- Show a map in PowerPoint or overhead to indicate where your office is and any other buildings that are relevant to the subject.

## **Transition checklist for lecturers of first year subjects (continued)**

- Refer to any transition programs in your faculty/department and encourage them to attend.
- Know the background of your group. Have all of your students studied your subject area at high school level?
- Be thoroughly prepared: this helps with the nerves and creates a good environment where there is no confusion.

## Transition checklist for lecturers of first year subjects (continued)

Make your expectations of the students very clear.

For example:

- What behaviour do you expect of them in lectures?
- Are there questions, discussion times or activities in your lectures?
- What time commitment is needed in this subject?
- Do you expect them to read everything on the reading list each week?
- Should they do any follow up after the lecture?
- Do you like to be approached after the lecture, or in office hours only?
- Is it okay to contact you by email?

## **Transition checklist for lecturers of first year subjects (continued)**

- Try to include an early feedback task in your subject; first year students find it difficult to gauge how they're going when they start tertiary study.
- Keep your subject homepage up to date and engaging; students appreciate using the web as a study and communications resource.

**Distance Education students:  
Categories of persistence barriers**

- Situational
- Dispositional
- Epistemological
- Institutional

## Distance Education students: Categories of persistence barriers

### Situational

- ◇ poor family support
- lack of free time
- change in circumstances
- took more time than expected
- study not related to job
- ◇ money problems
- \* **problem with study environment**
  - common to both persisters and non-persisters
  - ◇ mentioned by only non-persisters
  - \* mentioned only by persisters

## Distance Education students: Categories of persistence barriers

### Dispositional

- ◇ personal study problems
- \* unclear goals
- \* time management problems

- common to both persisters and non-persisters
- ◇ mentioned by only non-persisters
- \* mentioned only by persisters



## Distance Education students: Categories of persistence barriers

### Epistemological

- difficult content/discipline mismatch
- ◇ mismatch in assessment requirements
- ◇ course too management orientated
- course not hands-on enough
- ◇ course focus lacked personal relevance or interest
- ◇ subjects offered were not those desired
- \* lacked prerequisite knowledge
  - common to both persisters and non-persisters
  - ◇ mentioned by only non-persisters
  - \* mentioned only by persisters

## Distance Education students: Categories of persistence barriers Institutional

- problems with course schedule and pacing
- learning materials arrived late
- insufficient feedback on assignments
- insufficient/unsatisfactory communication with academics
- course focus and expectations not clear
- missed contact with other students
- inflexible course structure
- \* problems getting academic to call back
- course content was duplicated
- course content was wrong/outdated
- difficulty with residential schools
- problems with additional resources
- unit design and quality issues
- \* bureaucratic bungling
- \* confusing changes to course

## In the last decade...

- GOOD NEWS

universities have responded by having major shifts in policy and practice

- BAD NEWS

more students, bigger classes, less contact, higher staff workloads, higher fees, students spend more time in paid employment



# **First Year in Higher Education Conference**

**9th FYHE CONFERENCE 12 - 14 JULY 2006,  
GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY, Australia.**

First Year in Higher Education Conference 2004: Dealing with Diversity



*18th International  
Conference on  
The First-Year Experience®*

11-14 JULY 2005  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON  
SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND

<http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/international/>

## What we know...

- students entering tertiary education for the first time are increasingly diverse;
- academic staff's expectations of new students' abilities and knowledge are often unrealistic, and some students discontinue as a result of pressures arising from this mismatch;
- having a sense of purpose and a belief in one's ability is related to student commitment and satisfaction;

## What we know...

- **students are prepared to take responsibility for their own learning, provided that they feel supported by the institution;**
- **students whose learning takes place in learning communities rather than in large classes are more likely to persist and to succeed;**
- **students' sense of being socially and academically integrated is a critical factor affecting persistence and success.**

# **Student desertion RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- **Are the goals, study habits and levels of commitment of students changing?**
- **To what extent and in what ways have the problems of transition and adjustment experienced by students changed over the past five years?**
- **Has the quality of the student experience of learning and teaching improved?**
- **What factors currently contribute to student attrition and course change rates?**
- **What motivates some students to defer study?**
- **How are technologies affecting student learning and engagement?**

*Thank you*