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## Introduction

Commencing students and non-school leavers, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, have reported difficulty in transitioning to a more independent learning mode due to a lack of real-time contact with faculty staff and peers.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Aim**  
This study aimed to evaluate the utility of a weekly Drop-in Support Centre (DISC), examine profiles of attendees and assess the impact of attendance on academic performance in commencing (Year 1) students.

## Methods

### The Drop-in Support Centre

The DISC provided an informal, weekly (every Friday) learning space for students to access academic support when required. Some students made special arrangements to attend, up to eight hours as study time. Others came between tutorials.

### Data collected

Administrative data, including demographic information, were extracted from the University Student Management System. At the end of the year in 2016, the Grade Point Average (GPA) of students were collected. Attendance at the DISC was recorded over the 10-month period.

### Analysis

Descriptive statistics, and group comparisons of DISC attendees and non-attendees were computed. We also performed logistic regression to determine predictors of high GPAs among Year 1 students.

### Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UWS HREC H10338) in 2016.

### Participants

Of the 1008 nursing students enrolled on this campus, 163 (16%) attended the DISC in 2016. Table 1 shows the characteristics of DISC attendees.

Characteristics	n = 163
Age, mean in years, SD (Range: 17 to 56)	31.9 (9.6)
Sex, female, n (%)	135 (83)
Country of birth: Overseas-born, n (%)	120 (74)
Enrolment: International student, n (%)	15 (9)
First-in-family, n (%)	105 (70)
Year 1 students, n (%)	93 (57)
GPA at 12 months, mean, SD (Range: 0 to 7)	4.0 (1.4)

Table 1: Characteristics of DISC attendees

### Group comparisons: Non-DISC and DISC attendees

Figure 1 shows that those who attended the DISC were more likely to be: a) older ( $p < 0.001$ ); b) overseas-born ( $p < 0.001$ ); and c) Year 1 students ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## Results

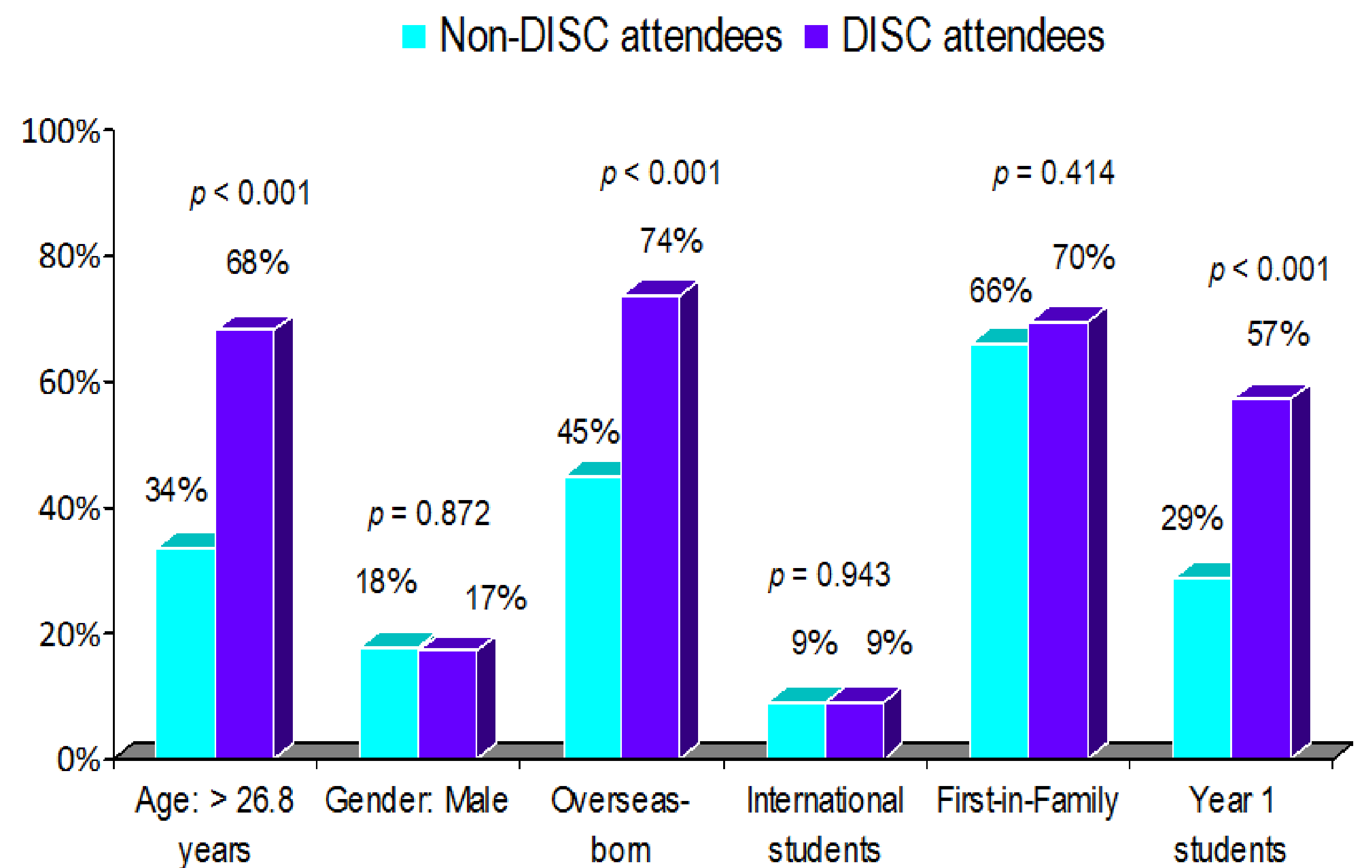


Figure 1: Group comparisons – Non-DISC and DISC attendees

Variables	Beta	SE	Adjusted odds ratio (95% CI)	P value
<b>High Grade Point Average at 12 months (More than 4) in Year 1 students</b>				
○ Age: > 26.8 years	-0.003	0.262	0.997 (0.596 – 1.667)	0.992
○ Australian-born	0.856	0.252	2.354 (1.437 – 3.858)	0.001
○ Drop-in support centre attendee	0.686	0.284	1.986 (1.138 – 3.465)	0.016

Table 2: Predictors of high GPA at 12 months in Year 1 students

### Predictors of high GPA at 12 months (Year 1 students)

Among Year 1 students ( $n = 338$ ), taking into consideration age and birth country, DISC attendees were nearly twice as likely (Adjusted Odds Ratio: 1.986, 95% CI: 1.138-3.465) to achieve a higher GPA ( $> 4$ ) compared to non-DISC attendees (Table 2).

## Conclusion

The 16% DISC uptake rate among all enrolled nursing students over a 10-month period for face-to-face weekly study sessions suggests that students value a unique, non-threatening and relaxed space to study, whereby they are able to receive immediate feedback on their work, interact and work with peers on academic tasks.

The beneficial effect of the DISC among Year 1 students was also indicated by the higher academic performance among attendees, suggesting the benefits of learning communities with face-to-face academic support, particularly among Year 1 students in transition to higher education.

## References

1. Frohman, R. G. (2012). Collaborative efforts work! Reflections on a two-year relationship between Faculty of Health and International Student Services-Language and Learning Unit. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 6(3), A48-A58.
2. Holley, D., & Oliver, M. (2010). Student engagement and blended learning: Portraits of risk. *Computers & Education*, 54(3), 693-700.

## Drop-in Support Centre (DISC)

