

Enhancing the university experience for students from equity cohorts

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Abstract

In 2016 UNSW Sydney published an ambitious new strategy document—UNSW 2025—which includes a target to increase the representation of equity students from 6% to 12% (UNSW Sydney, 2015). Programs offered by Student Life are intended to lower the risk of attrition by providing a sense of connection to the university community. They offer opportunities for students to undertake volunteer work in community organisations, mentor peers or work as student leaders, thereby building their self-confidence and resilience.

Research has shown that students from equity groups are more likely to drop out of university than their peers. Low-SES students make up 17.1% of all enrolments and have a dropout rate of 31.1%. (Edwards & McMillan, 2017).

“Many students develop their institutional belonging from participating in extracurricular activities” (Moodie, 2016)

Through increasing students’ sense of belonging and connection such programs build their resilience and expand their social networks outside of their academic program. Students remark on how participating in programs contributes to their overall student experience.

“Volunteering increases self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction” (Luscher, 2014)
Student Life offers opportunities that are particularly attractive to equity students, and to which they may not have had access in their former education experience. Students see the benefits of assisting others like themselves during their transition into university. These students benefit greatly in terms of increased confidence and enhanced social capital.

References

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