

Designing LEAP UP (University Preparedness) transition program for students from refugee backgrounds commencing higher education

Carolina Morison,
Macquarie University, Widening Participation Unit.

Abstract

Students from refugee backgrounds are often highly motivated to pursue higher education learning following their journey of displacement and resettlement. Yet their lived experiences often create unique and compounding challenges that can impact on their academic preparedness and participation. Designing a program for students from refugee backgrounds transitioning into higher education would empower them with confidence to navigate their learning journey, as well as promote equitable opportunity and awareness. LEAP UP University Preparedness program was designed to deliver information, skills and contextual understanding of the learning environment, across both academic and social spheres, based on outcomes of researched literature, observation of practice and stakeholder consultation.

LEAP UP (University Preparedness)

Education is recognised as a right under many international conventions and a medium via which ontological security and future goals can be founded (Hannah, 1999). Education can enrich, broaden and transform an individual's experiences and world view, as well as raise confidence and encourage or reinforce a sense of belonging to a community (Bajwa et al, 2017). Understanding the multiple challenges that often face students from refugee backgrounds pursuing university learning, along with identifying support and engagement opportunities that can foster positive academic and social confidence, were key aspects to shape the LEAP UP program.

LEAP UP was designed as a scaffolded program, engaging final year high-school students in Phase 1, and students commencing university (often via alternate pathways to that taken by school leavers) in Phase 2. LEAP UP aimed to empower students with academic preparedness and confidence to pursue deeply participatory learning experiences. Phase 1 informed students of learning options, study skills, processes and support services available at university; while Phase 2 offered targeted academic assistance, connection with peers and academic staff and services, to foster a sense of belonging to the learning community.

References

- Bajwa, J., Couto, S., Kidd, S., Markoulakis, R., Abai, M. & McKenzie, K. (2017). Refugees, Higher Education, and Informational Barriers. *Refugee*, 33 (2), 56–65. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043063ar>
- Hannah, J. (1999). Refugee Students at College and University: Improving Access and Support. *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale De L'Education*, 45(2), 153-166. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3444944>