

Transitioning-in late enrolled students quickly and effectively

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The onboarding and transitioning-in process is essential for first year student engagement and retention. However, students who enrol late into the first study period may have limited opportunity to benefit from the psychosocial and academic development outcomes that this process scaffolds. A tailored strategy to support the accelerated onboarding of these students has been developed by The University of Southern Queensland Student Success Advising team. The development of this strategy illustrates the capacity of teams that support students to contribute to the roll out of a university wide approach that is responsive to stakeholder's needs and lived experiences.

With attrition in the first year representing approximately half of all attrition, an effective onboarding process in the early stages of a student's study journey is essential for encouraging the engagement and belonging of commencing students (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). The transitioning-in process begins with a series of critical first encounters, which support students' development of self-efficacy, belonging, wellbeing, and positive emotions relating to study (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). However, students who enrol late into their first study period are likely to miss out on this onboarding, which may negatively affect their success and retention (McIntosh & Brown, 2016). This was a concern at the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) at the start of 2024 with the advent of a new academic calendar. While the new trimester calendar promised students more flexibility, it also meant the first study period had an earlier start date than many other universities. It was anticipated that this could result in a higher number of students than usual enrolling after the last date to enrol (Friday of week two). To mitigate this experience, the UniSQ Student Success Advising (SSA) team developed a strategy that focused on supporting late enrolled students to transition-in to study quickly and effectively.

Development of a late enrolled strategy

Developing a late enrolled approach began by surveying third space stakeholders across the university. Respondents (n38) included 22 professional staff (wellbeing, careers, and support for learning), 11 academic staff (first year experience leads and first year course co-ordinators), and 5 student staff (enquiry and advising). Consistent with the literature, respondents commented that feeling overwhelmed and stressed, not knowing where to seek help, and under preparedness to complete the first assessment item would be significant challenges for late enrolled students (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; McIntosh & Brown, 2016).

Participants were also asked for their advice on onboarding late enrolled students quickly. Data from these responses were analysed manually and five emerging themes were identified that aligned with Lizzio's (2006) Five Senses of Success Model. The first theme focused on the need for students to reach out to the teaching team for help and support on what to do first. This sense of connection with the teaching team is central to students' early development of disciplinary engagement, relationship building, and personalisation of the first year (Lizzio, 2006; McIntosh & Brown, 2016). This was also highlighted through responses commenting on the need to connect with peers through tutorials and forums to help students make sense of their environment and understand academic expectations (McIntosh & Brown, 2016). Another clear theme was sense of resourcefulness and the need to seek help early, especially with academic

skills, learning support, learning management system (LMS) navigation, and development of learning support plans with the accessibility team (Lizzio, 2006). Finally, sense of capability around task and role clarity and academic competence came through strongly from all participants, who commented on the need for students to get started with their first assessment item, plan out their due dates, and catch up with their course material (Lizzio, 2006).

Through the collation and rationalisation of these findings, a suite of resources named Five Tips to Get on Track were developed in the format of a webpage, poster and video and socialised throughout the university. The survey themes were then used as a framework to script and scaffold a proactive phone outreach intervention to provide late enrolled students just-in-time personalised support.

Conclusion and discussion

Changes to the UniSQ academic calendar and delays to QTAC offer rounds subsequently delayed enrolment for first trimester start. This resulted in 146 commencing students and 555 continuing students late enrolling into weeks 3 and 4 of the first study period of 2024, approximately double that of the previous year. The late enrolled strategy is designed to support these students to transition-in by enhancing their development of self-efficacy, belonging, wellbeing, and positive emotions relating to study (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Lizzio, 2006, McIntosh & Brown, 2016). It is anticipated that the strategy will therefore mitigate the effects of late enrolling and ensure these student's chances for success and retention are similar to those who started on or before the trimester start date.

One of the major outcomes of the late enrolled strategy has been university wide acknowledgement of the barriers to learning late enrolled students may experience and subsequent participation in the support of these students. This demonstrates that teams that support students can be responsive to internal and external change and contribute to the roll out of institution wide strategy by creating support and services that reflect stakeholder's needs and lived experiences.

Questions for audience discussion

1. Considering your context, what advice would you give to late enrolled students?
2. Considering a whole-of-institution approach, what strategies could your university implement to improve the onboarding experiences of late enrolled students?

References

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