

## **The Orientation program for First Year Pilots.**

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The Airline industry is looking for specific types of people to recruit as its pilots. Airlines are seeking individuals who have a history of interest in Aviation, have strong leadership skills and teamwork and analytical skills and overall are well-rounded interesting people to work with.

Over the past 12 months Aviation at Griffith has developed an extra-curricula program aimed specifically at enhancing these skills and concomitantly enhancing the student experience across all years of the course. The first year experience is of course the most pivotal year and the most significant time in the first year is the orientation week.

This paper discusses how Aviation at Griffith has developed an Orientation week program and an exciting extra curricula first year experience that students understand, enjoy and participate in.

During 2007 all students in the Aviation Degree at Griffith University were split into groups known as "flights". Each flight is named to honour a specific Australian Aviation Icon, namely W Hudson Fysh, Paul McGinness, Lores Bonney and Richard Williams. The flights have student leaders and one overall student leader the "Chief Student Pilot". Students are allocated to the flights randomly except that there is an equal number of females in each flight as female participation is around 20%. A long list of potential student leaders are chosen at the start of the third semester in the Degree. These potential leaders are chosen by the academic staff of Aviation at Griffith. However the final 4 student leaders are elected from the long list by the student body. This is managed so that the leaders are actually the leaders as seen by the staff who have many years of aviation experience and know what the industry is looking for in its leaders, but providing the students with a significant degree of input into the final leadership group. The leadership group is announced at the Aviation Ball and Awards night held on the last night of second semester.

Every Wednesday night all available students meet to participate in organising the activities of the overall student group and specific flights events. Each student in the aviation degree also practices public speaking every Wednesday night of the semester. This is managed by seeking 4 volunteers from each year to speak to their year group. In first year there is no critical appraisal of the speech. Rather this time is intended purely as a confidence booster. The First year talks are approximately 10 minutes long with 5 minutes of questions. In second and third year students are taught to provide a critical appraisal of their fellow students discussion in a positive manner. As well as these speeches to the entire year group the student body is broken into groups of 5-6 and each student in each small group makes another presentation to that smaller group. This provides the entire student body with regular practice at oral presentations and provides a mechanism to boost student confidence. Early in the first year students are only asked to discuss topics they are familiar with i.e. vacations or their personal experiences of life. As the year passes the students are challenged

more to discuss topics specifically in the airline or aviation field. Thus the general knowledge of the Aviation industry is also expanded for the entire student body. At times guest presenters such as industry leaders are invited to attend and make a presentation as well as hear students speak to their year groups.

At the end of 2007 the student group decided to provide a really welcoming experience for the 2008 first year students. The students discussed a program that they were happy to organise and small task groups formed themselves. The Flight Leaders provided oversight and the Head of Aviation at Griffith provided further advice on the activities. All 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students decided to become mentors for the 1<sup>st</sup> year students. The mentoring group was named MATES, Mentoring Aviators Through Educational Support. While students were encouraged to attend mentoring programs offered by the University, few were able to do this. A PowerPoint presentation was loaded onto the MATES organisation site for all Aviation students to see to give them at least some idea of the mentoring process.

On the first day of Orientation week all available second and third year students gathered at 0800 to be briefed on the small mentoring role they had which was to effectively simply be a point of contact for 1<sup>st</sup> years and to guide them to decision points and places to be rather than telling them and showing them. The overwhelming majority of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years presented themselves as MATES, which allowed for around a 2 to 1 ratio of first years to MATES. There was an almost doubling of student numbers from 2007-2008.

At 0900 all students gathered in a large lecture theatre and around 30 minutes was used to explain what was going to happen with their MATES and to explain orientation week and other aviation related issues. After this initial period the news students were allocated into their flights, introduced to their flight leaders and they moved off to flight specific locations where the flight leaders allocated the MATES to the first year students. The MATES then did a brief tour of the campus and all the students attended the major School welcome. This was followed by formal University organised activities. MATES either attended these sessions with first years or had provided phone contact for them to call if they encountered any problems. Many of the MATES also had lunch on the first day with the first year students.

On Tuesday more aviation specific activities were organised by the returning students. These included a Paper Plane throwing competition with prizes, flight simulator flights and individual Mentoring with MATES. After this session a specific aviation information session with the Head of Aviation at Griffith and Administrative staff was held to again address any issues students had. Then later in the afternoon a senior member of the Pilot profession made a presentation on the life of an International Airline Captain, followed by questions and answers.

Wednesday saw 2 of the 4 flights playing touch football while the other 2 flights played Beach Volleyball and then the groups swapped around. During the swapping process some of the returning students provided displays of their flying skills with model aircraft. The conclusion of the day and the formal part of Orientation week was the showing of the Movie "Top Gun" for all the aviation students.

At the first Wednesday night meeting of the student body for the year all first years were asked to complete a questionnaire on their experience of Orientation week. The results were extremely positive. 100% of the questionnaires were returned. Males

made up 80% of the group with 20% participation from females. The only major difference between the groups was that more of the female students were apprehensive about coming to University than the males 53% (male) compared with 61% (female) and of these 17% of the females were extremely apprehensive compared to 4% of the males. 50% of all the students felt overwhelmed by the numbers of students at University. However 90% were more comfortable after the introductory sessions and 82% felt that their MATES mentor was helpful. 87% of the students felt that the small groups gave them a sense of belonging. 99% believed that their questions about University had been answered or they know how to get the information they required. 95% felt that the orientation week activities were appropriate and 72% thought the number of activities was exactly right. 94% of students felt they were more confident after their orientation week experience.

Overall this activity has been enormously successful and the students are well engaged and even in week 2 of the semester participation in the extra curricula activities is exceptional. The things that need to be worked on are encouraging more students to attend a mentoring workshop, a little work on timetabling of activities and better informing students of the locations they need to attend. Other than these issues the overwhelming view of the students is that the Aviation Orientation week worked well and this establishes the way ahead for the rest of the first year and the full University experience.