

## **Creating and delivering radical change ... overnight!**

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Deakin University has created radical institution-wide change to O'Week (now Week Zero) as part of an emphasis on quality transition and student retention.

In the space of 6 months from the initial meeting, the following innovations were designed, planned and introduced in 2008:

- Name change adopted and accepted across the university (and in the media) to Week Zero to reflect a focus on academic orientation and preparation
- Block timetabling to ensure no student had a program clash
- Individual itineraries – 8000+ students
- Redeveloped dynamic transition site
- A senior student to facilitate networking activities with a group of students from the same course
- Passport challenge for engaging with on campus services
- Comprehensive concurrent workshop schedule – conference format
- Initiatives to help students to feel part of and identify with the university and their faculty in particular
- Highly visible hosts on campus to help for the first 6 weeks
- Revised evaluation processes including intercept surveying and multiple stakeholder analysis
- Transition report and directions adopted by Academic Board

Such change could not have occurred without a systematic and collaborative approach across all faculties, divisions and the student association.

This presentation takes you through the process of change, how consultation and collaboration were fostered and the outcomes implemented to create a positive and welcoming environment for commencing Deakin University students. It's also a heads up to the problems and solutions which arose along the way and what changes, what worked and what will be changed in 2009.

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### **Detail:**

#### **The change process:**

Recreating the image, ambit and membership of the Orientation Week Working Party was the first objective. The newly defined and named Orientation and Transition Planning Group convened in August and quickly agreed to new terms of reference to reflect the direction the team wanted to take transition and orientation in. Previously including administrative staff only,

academic engagement was seen as critical to create success. The current group includes several academics, including an Associate Dean.

The first task was to consider the issues, feedback and best practice models to inform a program for 2008.

### **Consultation/presentation process**

The development of solutions has occurred and managed through a variety of approaches:

1. Through the Planning Group – the Orientation and Transition Planning Group have worked collaboratively on the objectives and have actively sought involvement from key people in their faculties.
2. Individual consultations – consultations on the solutions developed took place through individual meetings with representatives of each faculty, library, IT, Deakin International and DUSA (student association). Issues relevant to each of these areas were discussed at these meetings and issues incorporated in the design. Broad consensus and support for the changes were given by every group at each of these meetings.
3. Presentation to Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning – after a personal presentation supported by an overview and attachments, AD'sTL discussed the proposals and offered broad consensus for the direction.
4. Campus team presentations – specific meetings were arranged on each of the smaller campuses which were under-represented on the Planning Group.
5. Presentations on request – presentations were made to various divisional and faculty staff at the request of the representatives of these groups.
6. Embedding change in policy – the objectives and initiatives of the team were presented to the Vice President (Administration) for inclusion in a policy document endorsed by Academic Board in December.

### **Key elements of the new design**

The team looked at a number of initiatives to address the issues, respond to feedback and engage best practice. The major initiatives were:

#### *1. Block timetable*

Timetables were developed on a block basis for the major campuses, with variations for the smaller regional campuses. This approach gave each faculty the run of the campus and resolved competition for rooms and competing priorities for double degree students. Each faculty had a priority one block and option on a priority two allocation where it would not create a clash for **any** student.

## 2. *Individual itineraries*

Each student received a personalized itinerary outlining all activities they can/should attend for the week and none that they shouldn't (ie health students did not have other faculties' activities on their itinerary).

## 3. *Transition hosts*

All students were allocated a senior student from **their** course and were given a hand written card with a meeting place to join a group of 30 of their fellow students as their first activity on morning 1. This card also contained the host's name and contact details (mobile phone in most instances) for students to contact them with questions up to two weeks before Week Zero. Hosts led a large and small group activity to facilitate an opportunity for every student to get to know someone to engage in the wider program with. Diversity was a critical objective, with groups made up of a mix of local and international students. Hosts were employed on campus for the first 4 weeks (hours reducing over time) to help students find their way around, answer questions and refer as necessary. A small contingent were also employed weeks 8 and 9 for check up and exam preparation purposes.

## 4. *Passport challenge*

This 'Race around the World' style activity was designed to get students started on self-managed learning, working in teams and problem solving. The focus was also to have students engage with services rather than just have a campus tour and to adopt independent learning as a first activity.

## 5. *Being part of the tribe*

Each student received an '08' t-shirt from their host. T-shirts were printed and coloured to represent the faculties – white for commencing students and corresponding solid ones for hosts.



## 6. *Concurrent workshop program*

A conference style program of workshops was run over two days at each of the larger campuses and one afternoon on the other 2 campuses. Themed "Money and living" and "Study basics", sessions were repeated 4 times over the two days and addressed issues such as IT@Deakin, study skills, money, employment and living away from home issues. There were also library

workshops and a session delivered by the youth services group of local council entitled “Local Hotspots”, designed to create links with the local community.

## 7. Transition website

The transition site was redeveloped to be more interactive, involve new students in the content and incorporate the philosophy of just-in-time information.



## Broader transition program

The team has commenced work on a semester-long transition program. This identifies themes and concepts which would apply across the university at pivotal times, but developed in the context of the faculty/course/campus for relevance and ‘local’ flavour. Future discussions will look to extend this to a full year approach, including selection of second year units, investigating future employment options, portfolio development, etc in semester 2.

## Evaluation and the way forward

A rigorous evaluation process has been put in place to identify what worked, what improvements need to be made and what can be abandoned. These included:

- Intercept surveys week 1 (over 1000 insights into the best element of Week Zero and what most needed improving)
- Surveys of all workshop conveners and of workshop participants
- Host surveys
- Reports from each division and faculty and the student association
- Feedback from executive
- Comprehensive “Commencing students” survey
- Media analysis

Early surveying demonstrated that initiatives were highly regarded by students and staff and that most changes to be made are of the 'continuous improvement' variety. From an institutional perspective, major improvements will include:

- More group briefings with front line staff
- A daily/weekly briefing sheet for front line staff
- Earlier formulation of key documents (eg itineraries) to allow for greater engagement within the faculties
- Earlier coordination of materials and processes (6 month lead time only allowed for just-in-time processes)
- Systems to deal with late enrolling students to be improved