

Location, location, location

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It is almost a decade since the creation of a Faculty based position dedicated to the support needs of First Year on-campus science students at The University of New England. As reported at the 2003 Pacific Rim FYHE, the resulting program was ‘student centered, discipline-specific and delivered via group work and one-to-one contact...and designed primarily to meet the challenges related to tertiary literacy deficit’ (Muldoon & Godwin, 2003, p.1). Most recently, the role has been described as working with ‘first year on-campus students, subject lecturers and general staff to create a faculty culture in which the student’s active construction of the processes of development and learning is promoted’ (Belmont & Godwin, 2008, p.1). Quite some shift. No longer is the program seen as peripheral to teaching and learning activities of the Faculty but rather as an integrated component of the learning environment. This is reflected not only in the range of activities now undertaken in partnership with academic and professional staff¹, but also by the relocation of the office/consultation space.

The First Year Advisor² was originally located in a disused basement room adjacent to the Science Technical Workshop and the animal surgery in a building out of the way of first year students. The current arrangement now consists of rooms in a busy teaching orientated building. Academic staff and professional staff have now replaced sheep and tools as office neighbours. This is important, as increasingly, the support available for students stems from interactions that occur as much in informal settings such as conversations in tea rooms and corridors, as in more formal discussions and meetings.

This nuts and bolts session tracks the evolution of a set of initiatives that aim to socialise First Year students into the culture of their discipline. It will outline the processes whereby the curriculum traditionally associated with academic support is located within the formal curriculum of units provided by Schools and Faculties. It will discuss the interactions between Learning Advisors, Lecturers and Professional staff that contributed to a First Year environment that promotes the development of the skills, confidence and identity that are necessary foundations for academic success. Similarly, it will examine how such partnerships are core to the location of institutional retention efforts.

¹ Professional staff includes library, technical and administrative staff.

² Position title prior to 2008 was Faculty Mentor

The program's initiatives include:

- Staging of assessment tasks that afford the early identification and self awareness of learning needs
- Embedding of opportunities for the development and application of the skills that are required for progressive tasks and extending to include self-reflection of overall learning
 - Development of essay questions with consideration given to the research interests of First Year teaching staff
 - Workshops that are contextualised and timetabled within the unit.
 - Provision of resources and interactive activities with links in unit notes and guides and on unit home pages
 - Participation in unit online discussion boards (Blackboard)
- Essay resubmit options
- Academic planning, a monitoring program based around collation of the results of early assessment tasks in all core subjects provides feedback to students of progress beginning within the first six and continuing throughout the year
- Introduction of Peer Assisted Study Sessions

References

- Belmont, W. & Godwin, J. (2008). Problem or potential: a matter of perception. Proceedings of the Third European First Year Experience. 7-9 May, Wolverhampton, U.K.
- Muldoon, R. & Godwin, J. (2003). The Faculty Mentor Program in the Sciences: An innovative approach to supporting student learning. Proceedings of the Seventh Pacific Rim First year in Higher Education Conference: Enhancing Transition to Higher Education- Strategies and Policies that Work, Queensland University of Technology, 9-11 July, Brisbane, Australia.