Institutional, programmatic & personal interventions for an effective & sustainable first year experience

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Focus

INTERVENING for SUCCESS IN FIRST YEAR
On working at the front-end...

‘The situation is hopeless...............we must take the next step!’

Pablo Casals
Some of our Challenges working in First Year

- **Heroic individualism** – focus on local enthusiasts in local contexts vs mainstreaming & embedding sustainable practice
- **Status** – challenges locating FYE in the academic hierarchy & as core business
- **Alignment of Strategies** – no “silver bullet” but multiple strategies required towards the same end goals
- **Quality of Evidence** – need for rigour in the evaluation of our practice & efforts
- **Leadership** – we are “leaders in practice”, & need to claim that role (viz. leadership mind set)
Griffith Institutional Strategy

Goals – effectiveness & sustainability

- First Year Advisor role (2005-2009)
- Academic staff interested in FY students, their issues & experiences
- Responsible for planning a School/degree level FY experience plan, leading & organising academic orientation, transition & monitoring, & advising commencing students
- Leading the FY experience in a School/Program
- First of its kind to be implemented systematically at the whole-of-university level in Australian higher education
My Focus

- My practice as a First Year Advisor from 2006-2009 –
  - Developing
  - Implementing
  - Evaluating
  - Whole-of-School approach to FYO&E
  - Demonstrated outcomes (evidence base)
  - Frameworks & strategies for working strategically (theory-practice links)
Evidence of Success

Evaluation data for School of Psychology

- 2007 - Identified by DVC(A) as best practice in FYO&E at Griffith
- 2007 - 13% improvement in student retention in my School even with slightly lower entry levels scores than for the previous year
- 2008 - retention in the top 30% of programs nationally (our Institutional goal met)
- 2007-2009 - Our Institutional data shows a gradual increase in all key indicators, with most above the Griffith average
The Foundations......How can we work strategically?

Leadership Stance

Facilitating Capability Agenda  Systems Thinking Orientation
Design Process & Principles

1. Convening Partnership Roles
2. Coherent Practice Models
3. Data-based Planning
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies
5. Continuous Monitoring and Feedback
1. Convening Partnership Roles

‘The universe is made up of stories, not atoms.’

Muriel Ruketser
1. Convening Partnership Roles: Within a School who contributes …and how?

- School Leaders as Sponsors
- School Admin Officer as Partner
- FYA as Systems Convenor
- Senior Students as Mentors and Leaders
- FY Course Convenors as Managers
- FY Tutors as Learning Facilitators
- First Years as Community Members

School Leaders as Sponsors

FY Course Convenors as Managers

FY Tutors as Learning Facilitators

Senior Students as Mentors and Leaders

First Years as Community Members

School Admin Officer as Partner

FYA as Systems Convenor
1. Convening Partnership Roles: External to the School who contributes….and how?
1. Convening Partnership Roles…contd.

What key principles guide our approach?
- Whole of school – ‘joined up’ and ‘wrap around’
- Co-ordinated towards the same outcomes
- Consistent messages from multiple sources

What consistent messages do we try to deliver?
- **Efficacy**: *We all want you to succeed and we will support and challenge you to do so.*
- **Inclusion**: *We value difference.*
- **Partnership**: *We can’t do this without your active involvement.*
- **Follow through**: *We are conducting a joined-up, coherent process not a disconnected series of events*
1. Convening Partnership Roles
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2. Coherent Practice Models

There is nothing quite so practical as a good theory.

Kurt Lewin
2. Coherent Practice Models

TYPES OF MODELS

- Student Process:
  - Five senses of success
  - Student lifecycle
- Systems Process:
  - Levels of Intervention framework
STUDENT PROCESS: What do we know from research about success in first year?

Students are more likely to succeed if they:
- Invest time on task → time spent studying each week is the strongest predictor
- Regularly attend lectures & tutorials → increased learning opportunities also a strong predictor
- Develop a social network at uni → knowing one person’s name is a protective factor against dropping out
- Have a clear goal or purpose for attending uni (sense of vocational direction & purpose especially) → a strong predictor of success
- Engage with the online environment → moderates success at university
- Balance commitments (working on average not more than 15 hours a week in paid employment) → making appropriate time for study predicts success
- Have some sense of academic self-confidence → predicts success (self-efficacy & an expectation of success is foundational to success in life)
STUDENT PROCESS: What do we know from research about risk factors in first year?

*Students are more likely to drop-out or fail if they:*

- Don’t develop a **social network** at university
- Don’t have a **sense of purpose** (esp **vocational purpose**) in their degree
- Don’t **regularly attend** lectures & tutorials
  (with the exception of a small group of young, very intellectually bright males)
- Don’t have access to or **engage with the online environment**
- Do work **more than 25 hours per week** while studying full time
- Are the ‘**first in their family**’ to attend university (low social capital)
- Are a member of a **minority or disadvantaged group** (e.g., Indigenous, rural, disability, refugee, international, primary caregiver in family, single parent)
2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (Lizzio, 2006)

The ‘Five-Senses’ of Student Success

- Sense of Connectedness
- Sense of Capability
- Sense of Academic Culture
- Sense of Resourcefulness
- Sense of Purpose
2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (HEA, 2001)

Students’ needs and developmental priorities vary over their degree trajectory

Early Contact

Pre-Semester (Enrolment & Orientation)

First 7 Weeks of Semesters 1 & 2

End of semester 1

Year One

Years 2 & 3

Alumni and Postgraduate
2. Coherent Practice Models: Systems Process (Caplan, 1964)

Levels of Intervention framework

- **Tertiary Prevention**
  - ...failing students?

- **Secondary Prevention**
  - ...at risk students?

- **Targeted/Selective Primary Prevention**
  - ..........specific groups of students?

- **General/Primary Prevention**
  - What do we do for all students?
2. Coherent Practice Models

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THESE MODELS?

- Literature and evidence-base enables staff confidence and buy-in
  
  **Meta message:** *We are approaching this in a scholarly and systematic way*

- Shared language facilitates students’ confidence in the system
  
  **Meta message:** *We have really thought about this & we know what we are doing.*

- Clearly articulated framework facilitates student’s self-management
  
  **Meta message:** *We are not just giving you information – we are providing you with tools to do a job.*
Design Process & Principles

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3. Data-based Planning

Vision without action is a daydream
Action without vision is a nightmare

Japanese proverb
3. Data-based Planning

- **Understanding our Context**
  What is our current situation?

- **Setting our Vision**
  What are we trying to achieve?

- **Naming the strategic gap**

- **Identifying our Strategic Goals**
  What key differences should we try to make?

- **Selecting our Strategic Activities**
  What are useful ways of doing this?

- **Committing to Action**
  What resources will we invest?
3. Data-based planning

Needs to occur at a **range of levels** & to be informed by **multiple data sources** –

- **Presage or input data** e.g., info on Institutional student populations & the typical demographic profile in particular Schools (including risk factors)

- **Process evaluation data** e.g., evaluation of enabling processes or orientation activities

- **Soft performance outcomes** e.g., student satisfaction

- **Hard performance outcomes** e.g., student retention, academic achievement
3. Griffith Starting@Griffith Survey Findings with 2,000 students

- **Student satisfaction can be facilitated** – 5 senses of success predict early student satisfaction
- **Orientation can be enabled** – effective orientation contributes to student satisfaction & academic success in first semester
- **Persistence is predictable** – 2 strongest predictors of not returning after semester 1 are low academic self-confidence & unclear purpose
- **Targeted intervention is helpful** – students with a disability or who are primary care givers in their families are less likely to return in semester 2
- **The future is more important than the past** – students who are “First-in-Family” are just as likely to succeed as second generation students
3. What do we know about the risk profile of Griffith Students?

Compared to other universities in Australia:
- **More** of our students work in paid employment
- And they work **longer hours** in paid employment
- Are more likely to be the ‘**first in their family**’ (FIF) to attend University
  - * Brisbane = 65% approx
  - * Logan = 80% approx
  - * Gold Coast = 57% approx
- FIF correlates with low SES & lower entry scores
- However, national data shows that students with **lower entry scores** do as well **academically** as those with higher scores, once engaged
3. Data-based Planning

Planning Process –
- Dean L&T facilitates a half day planning process for all FYAs in the Health Group
- Utilising a consistent framework - the 5 Senses of Success Model & Griffith First Year Planning document
- FYAs across the Group meet every 8-10 weeks to formulate initial plans for each year & to share practice ideas
- FYAs negotiate plans with School Leadership
- FYAs continue to meet to review the implementation & success of plans → First Year Community of Practice
Design Process & Principles

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4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

The ‘facts of student life’: Why do we have a multi-faceted strategy?

To some extent:

- All students have the same needs
- Groups of students have different needs
- Students have individual needs
- All students will have ‘unpredictable moments’

When it comes to FYO&E THERE IS NO MAGIC PILL or single right answer – we need a range of strategies, with each adding value
4. Two broad Types of Strategies for Intervention

- **First Generation Strategies = Co-Curricular**
  A focus on designing FYO&E supplemental activities & strategies which are outside of the classroom

- **Second Generation Strategies = Curricular**
  A focus on enhancing FY curriculum design, pedagogy & assessment practices
Second Generation Strategies

CURRICULAR APPROACHES
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 1: Enhancing Course Design

Key Idea:
Designing ‘transition sensitive’ learning environments

Key Aspects:
- Convening first year teaching team
- Constructing a ‘five senses of success’ culture in degree program and individual courses
- Consistent approach to first year course design
- Incorporating foundational academic skill development tasks into first year courses & assessment
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 2: Front-loading threshold (difficult) courses

Key Idea:
Not all courses are created equal!

Key Aspects:
- Pre-semester: Front-end Preparatory Workshop - “Statistics for the Terrified”
- First week: Explicate assumed knowledge - Prior knowledge test & student feedback exercise
- Ongoing: Supplemental instruction – extra JIT tutorials
- First and Assessment: Academic recovery - Intervene with students who fail using First-Assessment-First Feedback protocol
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 3: Enhancing Assessment Practice

Key Idea:
Optimising an experience of ‘early success’ builds academic and personal efficacy

Key Aspects:
- The nature and timing of early assessment
- Emphasis on formative assessment
- The process of preparing for assessment – scaffolding assessment preparation (practice items, essay writing etc.)
- The process of debriefing and learning from early assessment (summarise & feedback cohort strengths & weaknesses)
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 4: Enhancing Teaching Quality

Key Idea: Small-class teaching offers the greatest potential for engagement

Key Aspects:
- Tutor Development Coordinator role
- FY Tutor selection/matching
- FY Tutor training program
- First tutorial design
- Systematic formative evaluation of first tutorial for all FY Tutors (and new Tutors)
- Teaching practice observation & feedback
- Systematic summative end-of-semester independent evaluation (SET process)
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 5: Managing Attendance

Key Idea:
Collect and actively use hard data on ‘non-engagement’

Key Aspects:
- Attendance rolls kept for tutorials in core courses
- Non-attendance at first two tutorials regarded as a first ‘risk marker’
- Prompts outreach phone call to either:
  - provide support/encourage attendance or
  - facilitate withdrawal prior to HECS census date
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 6: First Assessment Feedback for at-risk students

Key Idea:
Efficacy building for students who ‘fail’ or ‘marginal pass’ first assessment in a core/threshold course

Key Aspects:
- Students complete a self-directed workbook
- Individual structured session with tutor leading to an action plan
- Follow-up phone or email contact
- Griffith Amber Alert strategy – sem 2/09 International students, sem 1/10 all students – email all non-submissions & fails on early/all assessment items
First Generation Strategies

CO-CURRICULAR APPROACHES
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 7: Early Student Engagement

Key Idea: Providing early contact prior to Orientation assists students to enrol and to engage with Orientation & the system

Key Aspects:

- Mail-out Day (M Day) - mail out of School specific information in late January inviting students to attend Enrolment & Orientation Days, to enrol in the Peer Mentoring Program & the Early Bird Workshops (Learning Services)

- Enrolment-day (E Day) – provide drop-in centre for academic advising on enrolment, timetabling, & electives choice a week before O-Day staffed by FY staff (FYA, convenors, tutors) admin staff (SAO) & Peer Mentors
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 8: Managed Transition/Orientation Process

Key Idea:
Building engagement requires an ‘ongoing process’ not just an ‘orientation event’

Key Aspects:
- Semester 1:
  ✓ O Week - 1 day workshop + Timetable-Enrolment Clinic
  ✓ Weeks 1-7 ongoing Orientation thro Academic Success Program (Common Time)
    - 1 hour per week adjacent to core course
    - Topics in a JIT sequence (viz., admin., problem solving, assessment)
    - Predictable staff-student contact opportunities

- Semester 2:
  ✓ Weeks 1-3 Academic Success Program (Orientation Program for semester 2)
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 9: Priming Student Self-regulation
Key Idea:
Student success depends on their capacity to master the meta-skill of self-management

Key Aspects:
A. Explaining Predictors of Success
- What predicts success? (e.g., attendance, time in paid employment, social connection, engage with technology, etc)
- What are potential risk factors (framed as less “social capital” therefore need to engage with more supports available)? (e.g., work, first-in-family, rural, minority group membership)
- What does this mean for you?

B. Establishing Mutual Responsibility Frame
- What are key transition goals? (e.g., social connectedness, vocational purpose, etc)
- What is the School doing to help?
- What can you do to help yourself?

C. Embedding Self-Assessment Processes
- On line Self-assessment and feedback tools (e.g., Expectations@Griffith Communityworks, Skillworks)
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 10: Peer Mentoring

Key Idea:
Engaging senior students as mentors and partners in the community building process

Key Aspects:
- Training program is collegial (intervention team)
- Mentors undertake a range of roles across O-Week & weeks 1-7
  - problem solvers
  - translators
  - intelligence gatherers
  - interventionists/change agents
- Provide ongoing support and problem-solving for Mentors
- Program review and evaluation
- Coordination of efforts between mentors, tutors & FYA with students
- Recognition of Mentors through celebration (First Year Party) and Certificate
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 11: Early Vocational Focus

Key Idea:
Clear career pathways contribute to meaningful engagement and persistence

Key Aspects:
- Semester 1: Career Development Workshop (week 5)
- Semester 2: Learning About My Profession (LAMP) (weeks 3-5)
  - Panels of professionals from the field
  - Structured reflection protocol
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 12: Student Governance

Key Idea:
Students are an underutilised resource in ‘capacity building’
We actively position students in our structures and processes

Key Aspects:
- Undergraduate Student Council - representative slice of staff and students from years 1 to 4
- Forum for both system’s problem solving and positive development & encouragement of student “voice” & leadership
4. Complementary Suite of Strategies

Strategy Set 13: Relationships and availability

Key Idea:
Because the student experience is often unpredictable much strategic help is unable to be planned and programmed

Key Aspects:
- Developing systems with ‘scaffolded opportunities’ for casual contact
- Timely conversations can make all the difference (FYA, FY Convenors & Tutors, Peer Mentors)
- Programs and interventions without an ‘ethos of genuine engagement’ are perceived by students as hollow
- We can’t engage students from a disengaged stance
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5. Monitoring and Feedback

Listen to the words of the critic. S/he reveals what your friends hide from you......but do not be weighed down by what the critic says. No statue was ever erected to honour a critic. Statues are for the criticised.

Anthony de Mello
5. Monitoring and Feedback

Key Idea:
- Use data to inform evidence-based practice around the dual goals of:
  - What is **effective**?
  - What can we **sustain**?

Key Aspects:
- Multiple sources of feedback
  - students (feedback, reviews, evaluations)
  - mentors (feedback, review, evaluation)
  - staff (convenors, tutors, FYA, SAO)
  - surveys (University: Starting@Griffith Parts 1 & 2; School: first semester & first year experience, individual courses, FYA activity evaluations)
  - course results (submission & pass rates for individual assessment items & courses/subjects/units overall)
  - retention data
Finally...a note about important intangibles

*Life requires us to be 100 per cent committed to actions of which we are only 51 per cent certain.*

**Albert Camus**

*You must be the change you want to see.*

**Mahatma Gandhi**