

# 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)

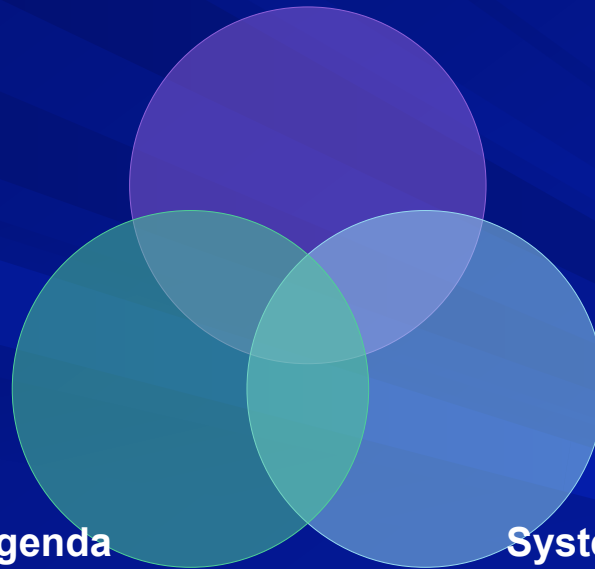
# Evidence of Success

## 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?

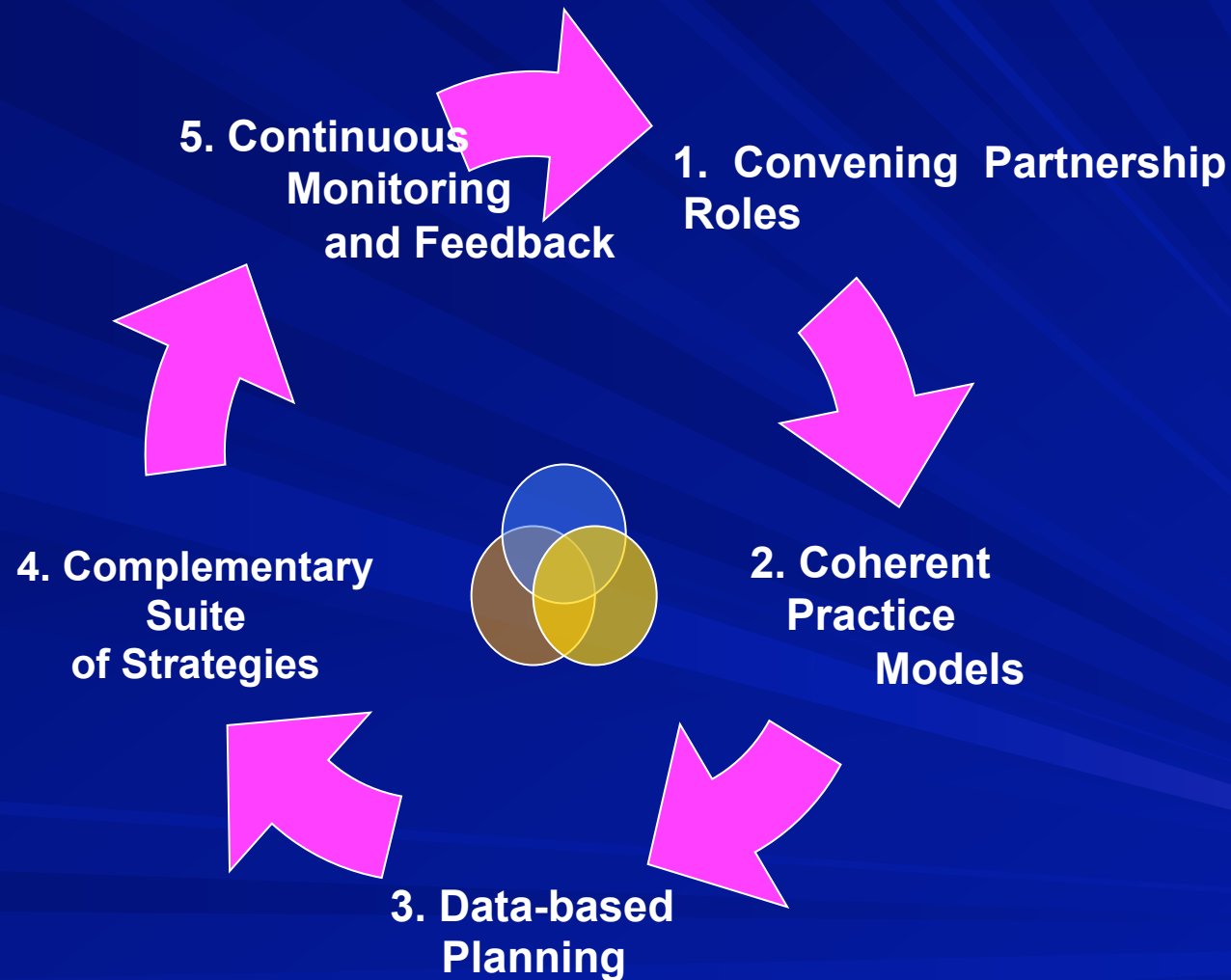
Leadership Stance



Facilitating Capability Agenda

Systems Thinking Orientation

# Design Process & Principles



# 1. Convening Partnership Roles

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

Muriel Ruketser

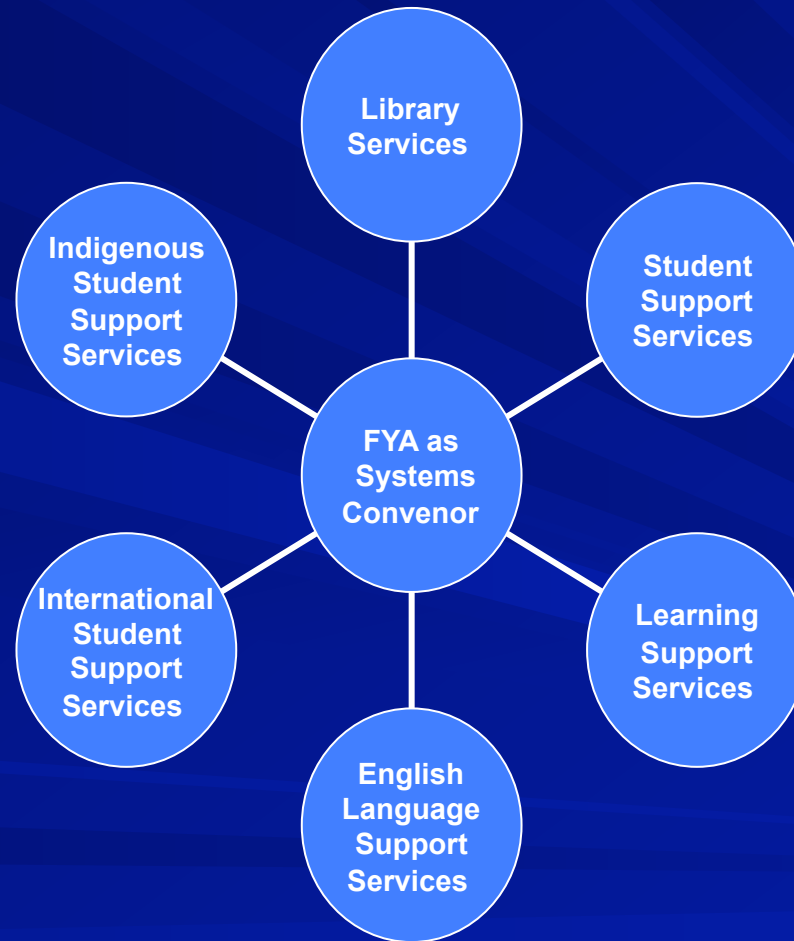


# 1. Convening Partnership Roles: Within a School who contributes ....and how?





# 1. Convening Partnership Roles: External to the School who contributes....and how?



# 1. Convening Partnership Roles...contd.

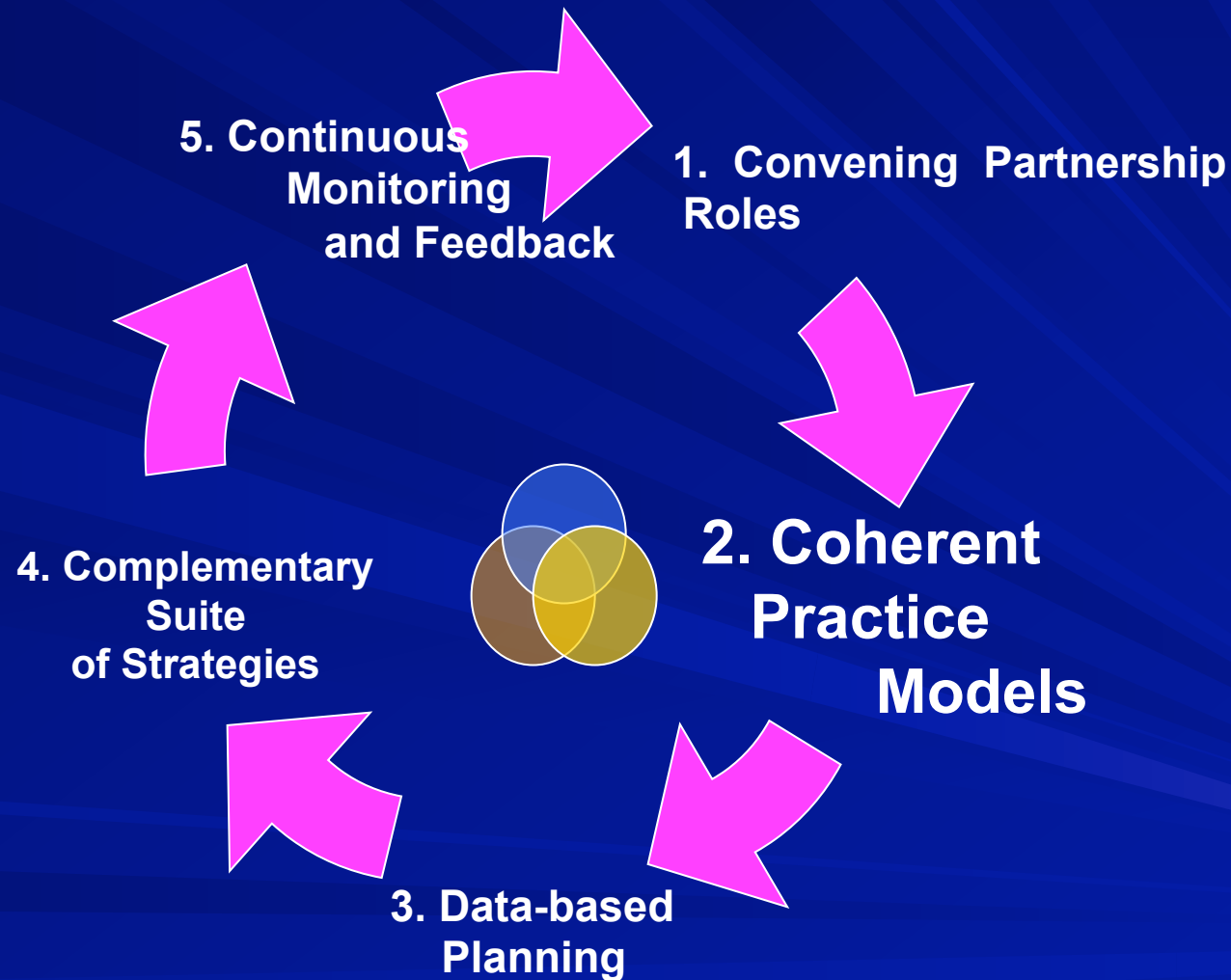
**What key principles guide our approach?**

- **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*

# Design Process & Principles



## **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?

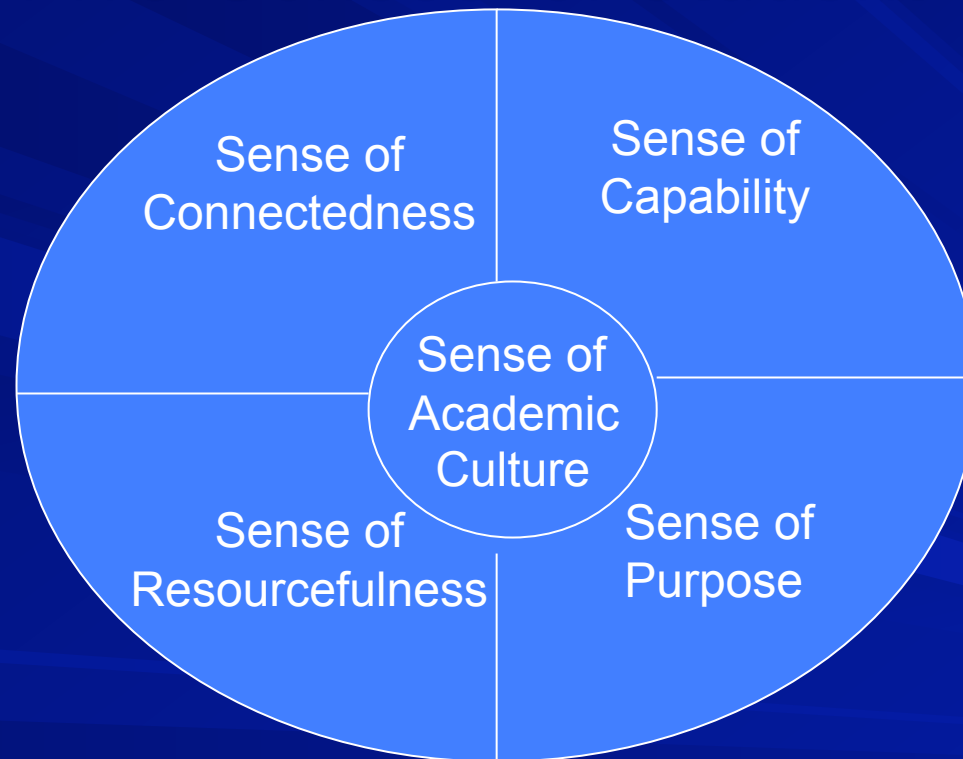
*Students are more likely to drop-out or fail if they:*

- 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)



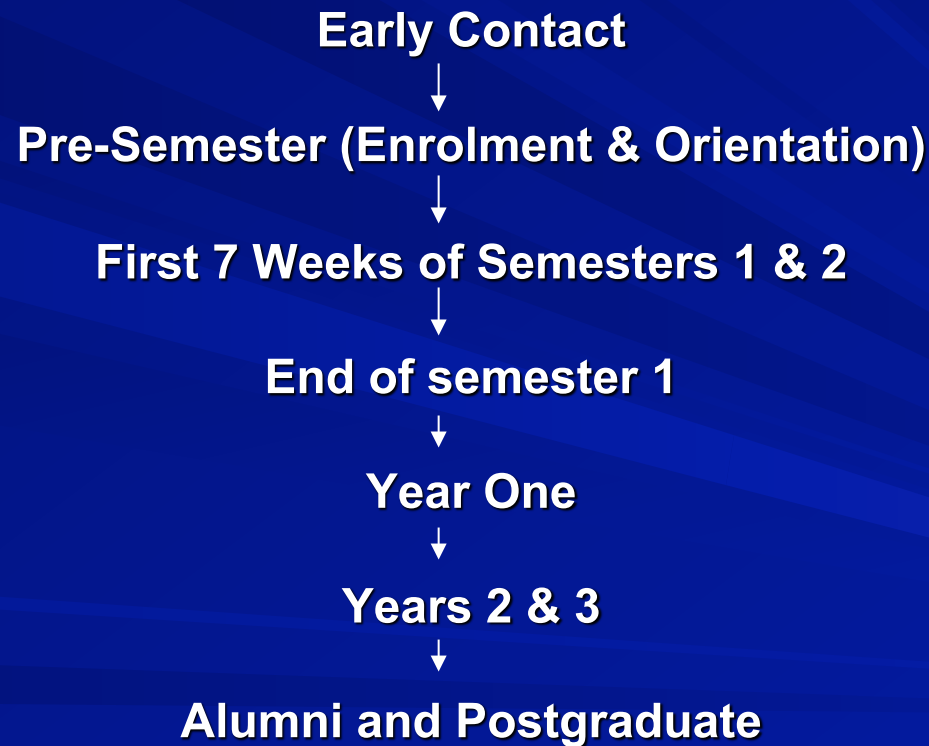
## 2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (Lizzio, 2006)

### The 'Five-Senses' of Student Success



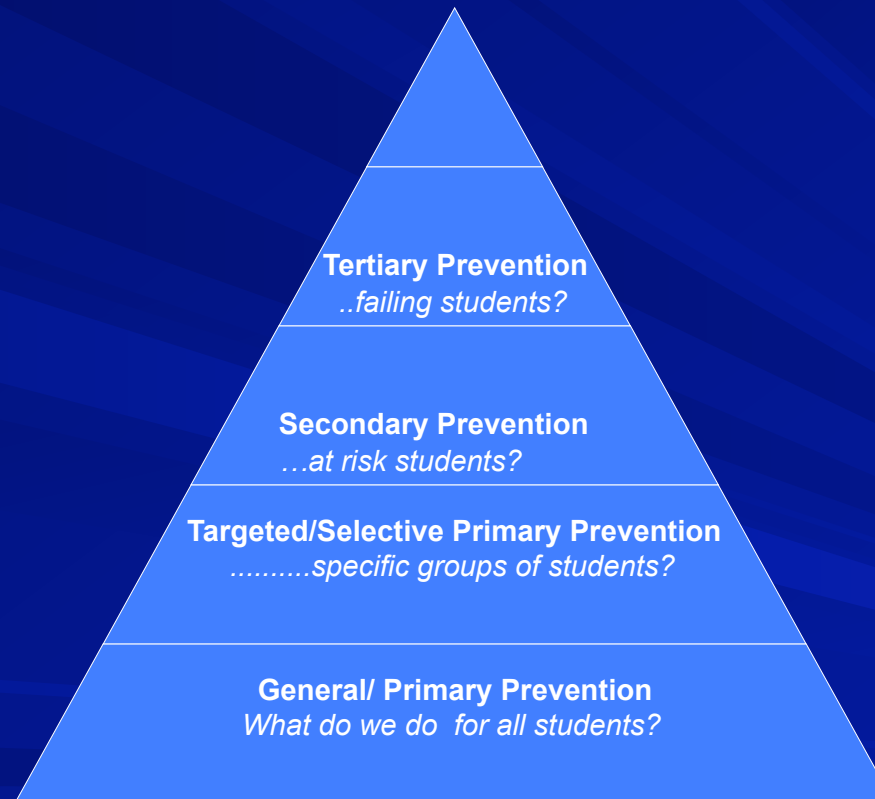
## 2. Coherent Practice Models: Student Process (HEA, 2001)

Students' needs and developmental priorities vary over their degree trajectory



## 2. Coherent Practice Models: Systems Process (Caplan, 1964)

Levels of Intervention framework



## 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*

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- Shared language facilitates students' confidence in the system

**Meta message:** *We have really thought about this & we know what we are doing.*

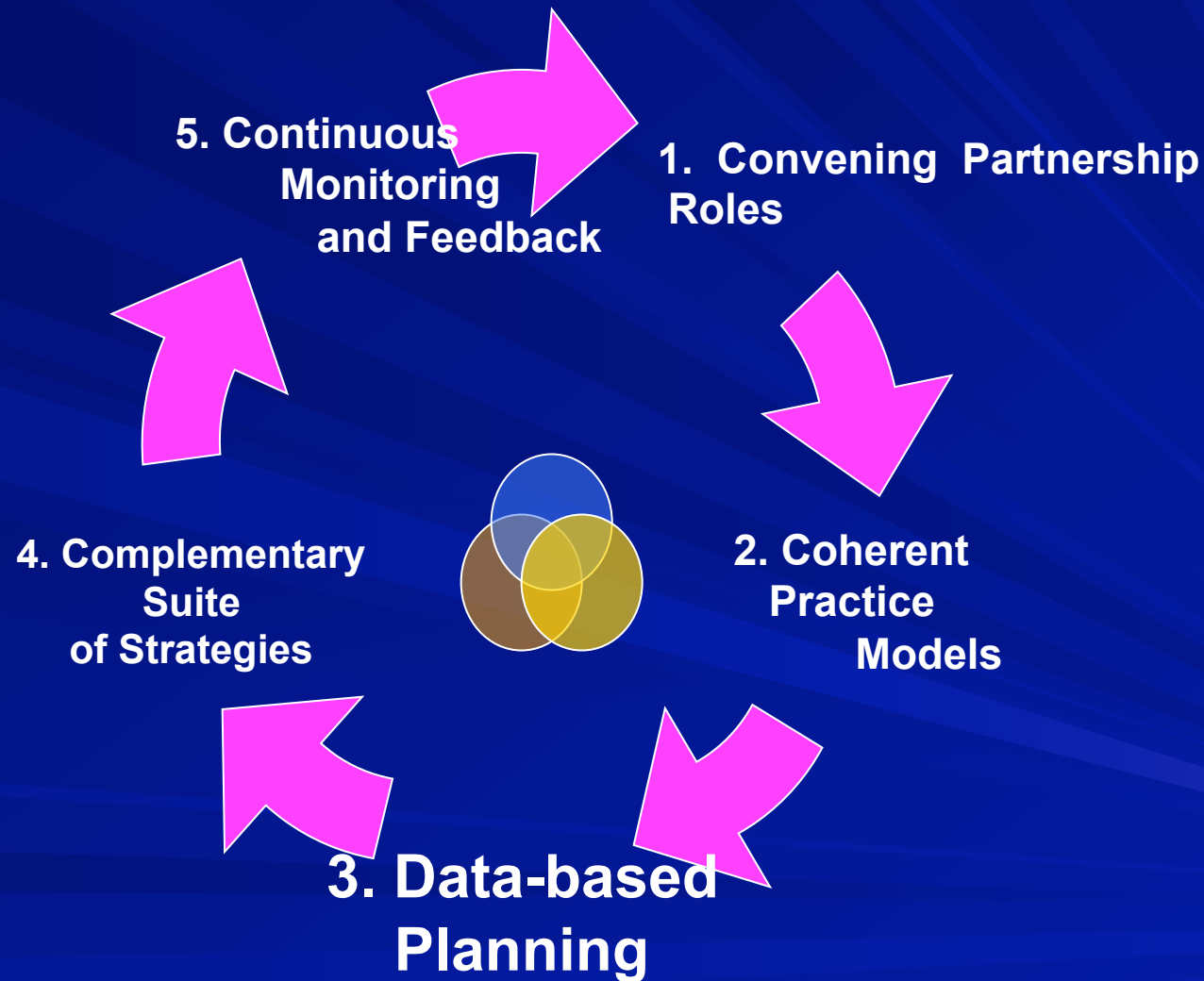
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- Clearly articulated framework facilitates student's self-management

**Meta message:** *We are not just giving you information – we are providing you with tools to do a job.*

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# Design Process & Principles



# 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

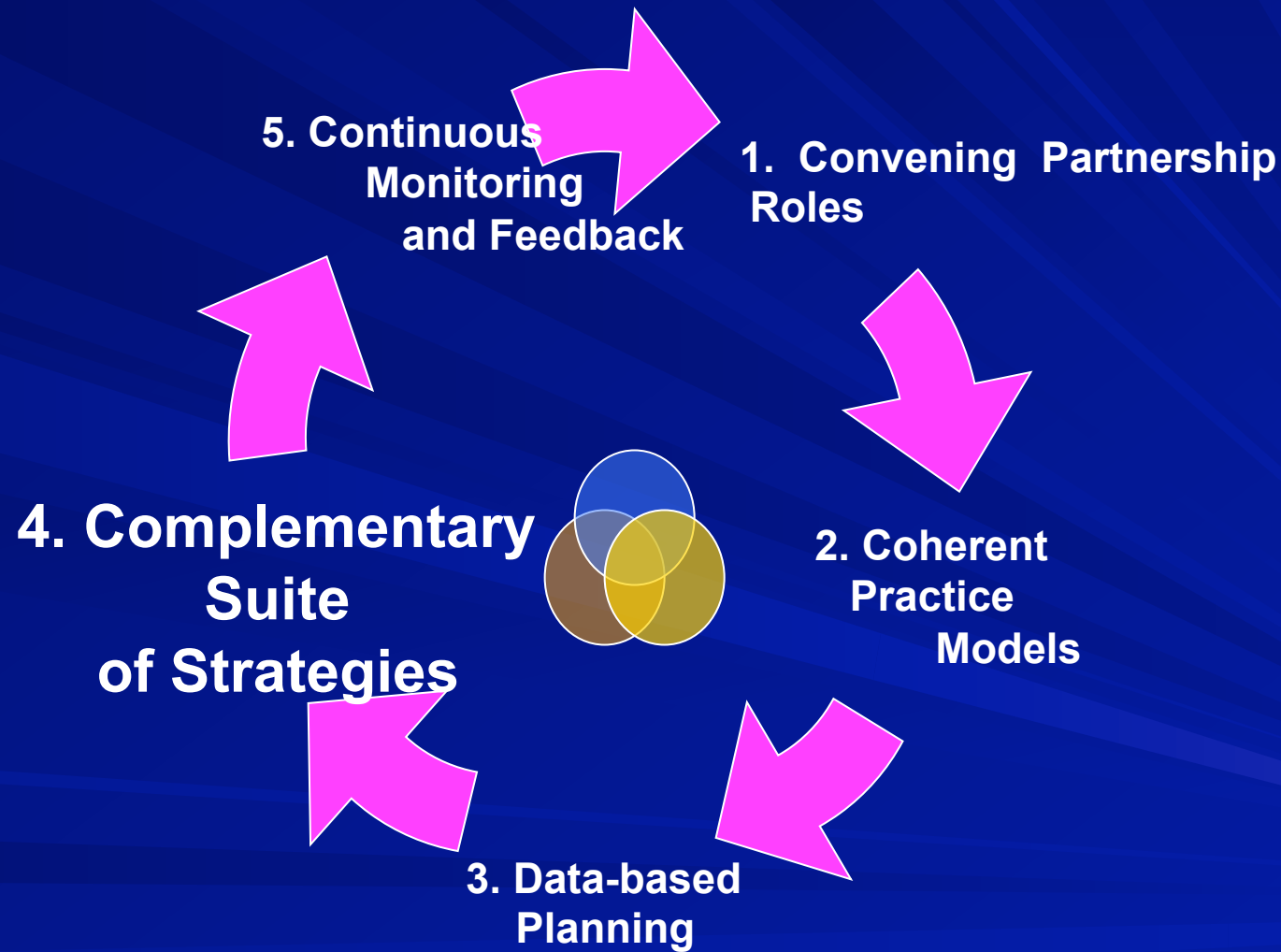
# 3. Data-based Planning

## 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



# 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 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 (& 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

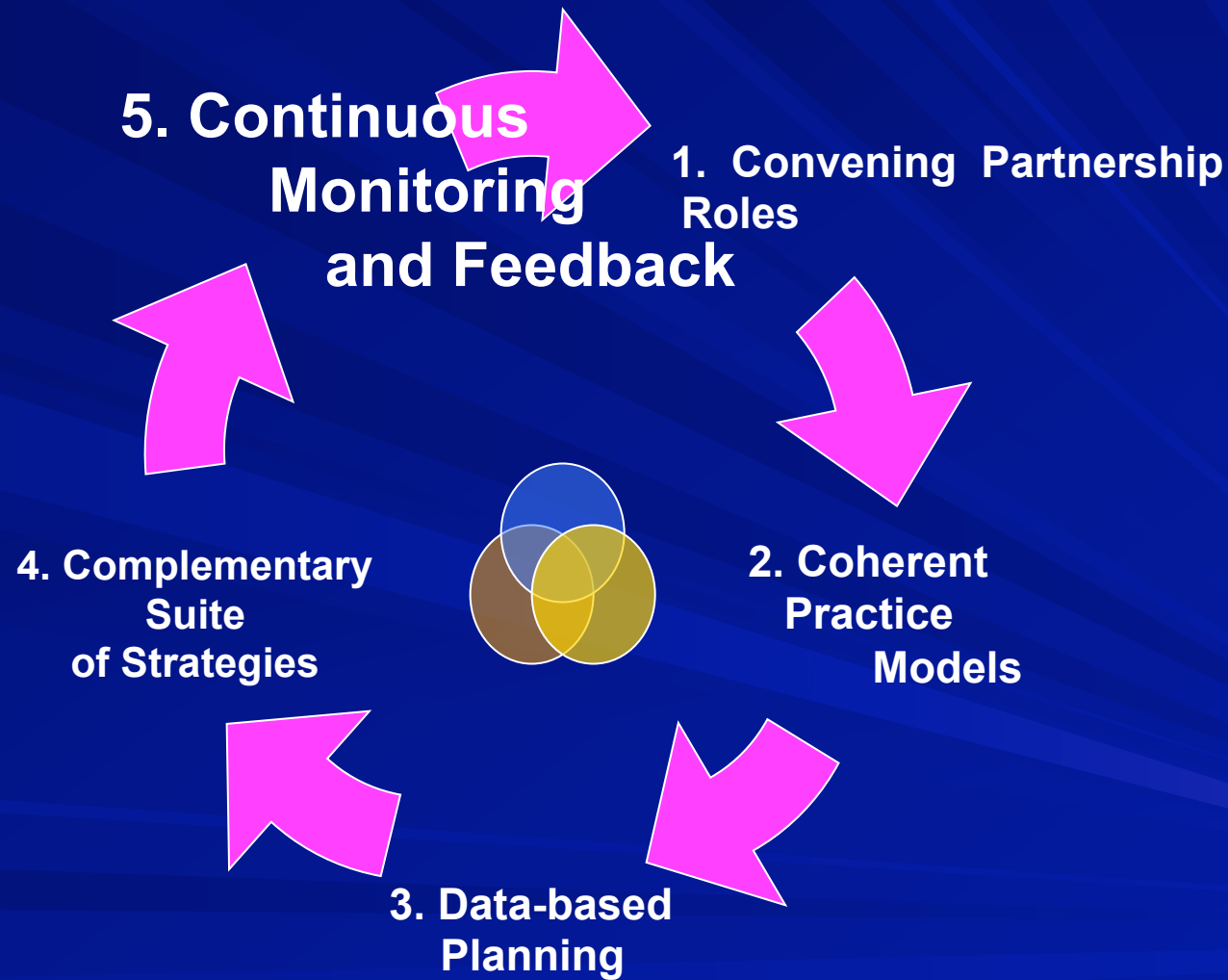
### Key Idea:

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**

# Design Process & Principles



## 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**