



Meeting students' needs: learning and teaching design targeting student transition

Key Words

Transition, cross-disciplinary collaboration, engagement and retention

Abstract

The national award winning First Year Experience (FYE) project at a large metropolitan university in Sydney supports the transition experience of all first year students with a particular focus on students from low socio economic (LSES) backgrounds. The FYE project aims to implement sustainable change that supports and enhances student retention and success, starting from first year. This is a response to the increasing diversification of the student cohort and is funded by the national Widening Participation Strategy (WPS). The FYE project awards small grants to applicants from faculties who wish to engage in intentional design of their subjects or curriculum to support transition. Our presentation will outline how members of the Academic Language and Learning (ALL) Team at the university have worked collaboratively on these small grants with disciplinary academics and educational designers to embed discipline specific academic language and literacy into subjects and courses. Participants will be able to extrapolate in relation to their own disciplinary areas through examining two case study examples, one from the Faculty of Law the other from the Faculty of Science, which illustrate how the projects articulate Kift's principles in practice (2009). The Faculty of Law used a FYE grant to develop teaching capabilities for tutors around teaching reflective writing as it relates to the development of management and professional identity. The Science Faculty has used a succession of grants to pilot the use of innovative technologies in the teaching of academic and professional discipline specific reading and writing skills. These technology-enhanced resources have received excellent feedback from staff and students and have improved students' confidence in scientific writing. The positive outcomes of the FYE project include cross-disciplinary sharing of ideas and best pedagogical practices leading to practice change in a 'ripple out effect' from the individual to the faculty and ultimately university wide. It has also enabled a culture of sharing and networking to develop across disciplines, which, in turn has strengthened the collaborative relationships between the ALL team members and their disciplinary colleagues. A major success of the FYE project is that the pass rates for LSES students have improved significantly and overall it has benefitted all students' learning and engagement in first year and beyond.

References

Kift, S. (2009). Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education: Final report for ALTC senior fellowship program: Australian Learning and Teaching Council Sydney, Australia. Retrieved from <http://transitionpedagogy.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Kift-Sally-ALTC-Senior-Fellowship-Report-Sep-09.pdf>