



Flying Start: partnering with students and other stakeholders in doctoral rites of passage

Key Words

graduate research education beginning researchers stakeholder partnerships

Abstract

Many ALL units are involved in collaborations with students and other stakeholders as part of graduate research education initiatives. This presentation reports on an innovative approach to helping beginning researchers navigate the first six months of candidature, involving partnerships with students and other stakeholders across campus. Flying Start is an intensive elective program designed to assist beginning researchers to understand and meet the requirements for confirmation of candidature, as well as to gain insights into the 'secrets of success' (Kearns & Gardiner, 2006), including working and communicating well with supervisors, managing projects and time effectively, building a network of peers and developing sound habits as a research writer. To achieve these goals, academic coordinators of learning support at the Centre for University Teaching and Learning have partnered with the Graduate Research Office, research librarians, counselors and doctoral students to provide a holistic program centred on the 'whole researcher'. Flying Start is delivered over four intensive days, two at the beginning and two at the end of the first six months. The program uses the 'Vitae Researcher Development Framework' (2011) to negotiate partnerships with other stakeholders and integrate diverse sessions ranging from structuring and writing research proposals and literature reviews, to avoiding perfectionism and procrastination, to identifying common PhD experiences. Flying Start also follows the principles of intensive mode teaching (Male et al., 2016) and the program focuses on threshold concepts and rites of passage in graduate research, uses a blended learning approach, and promotes a building a community of graduate research scholars. Finally, the program has deliberately involved more senior research students to help facilitate, present content sessions and share their PhD experiences through a panel discussion. This presentation discusses a range of issues in the design and delivery of this innovative program and the partnerships it involves. It explains how partnerships with other stakeholders have been made more robust by clarifying the roles and contributions of partners and how they complement each other, and determining mutual benefits. It also explores the changing identities of academic coordinators as they shift to facilitators, as well as deliverers of content, and of doctoral students as they shift from 'students' to junior researchers and partners in learning and teaching. Finally, it explores how the differences in approach amongst academic professionals as well as across the disciplines are understood and navigated in complex issues such as clarifying the boundaries of 'general' and discipline specific learning and teaching in graduate research education.

References

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