What works!
A richer understanding of student engagement will inform institutional practices.

Karen Nelson

Heads of Student Administration Conference
9-11 August 2017
Sofitel Noosa
Why?
“Higher education can transform the lives of individuals and through them their communities and the nation by engendering a love of learning for its own sake and a passion for intellectual discovery”.

“The Quadrants”

Non-Market

Greater social cohesion, trust & tolerance
Less crime
Political stability
Greater social mobility
Greater social capital

Market

Increased tax revenue
Faster economic growth
Greater innovation, and productivity of co-workers
Labour market flexibility
Reduced burden on public finances

Individual

Greater propensity to vote, volunteer, trust and tolerate others
Lower propensity to commit (non-violent) crime
Better educational parenting
Longer life expectancy
Better mental & general health
Greater life satisfaction

Higher earnings revenue
Less exposure to unemployment
Increased employability skills & development
Increased entrepreneurial activity and productivity

https://www.gov.uk/search?q=benefits+of+higher+education
Even a little higher education ‘is better than none’, study suggests

Dropouts do better in the labour market than those who never entered university, finds international analysis.

Jack Grove writes

Is it better to be a university dropout or to not have gone to college at all?

While there are often very good reasons for leaving university early, many worry that having “some college, no degree” on their job application will result in their CV being moved to the bottom of the interview shortlist pile.

Those university non-completers might wonder if they should have been advised to plunge straight into the job market rather than face a lifetime of explaining why they failed to graduate.

However, dropouts should not write off their time on campus because even a small amount of higher education is likely to improve a learner’s life chances, according to a study published in Higher Education Quarterly this month.

While dropouts may fret about the stigma of leaving university tertiary education – a 14.4 percentage point difference.

Disparities between university dropouts and those with no higher education are even greater if access to “top-level roles” is considered, says Dr Schnepf.

Some 23.5 per cent of students in Denmark drop out, but 58 per cent of these people return to complete their tertiary education.

In the UK, a third (33.8 per cent) of dropouts later came back into the system to graduate, a similar proportion to Canada (37.7 per cent).
### Financial imperative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016/1 to 2017/1</th>
<th>1% better</th>
<th>2% better</th>
<th>5% better</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base students</strong></td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2016/1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attrited students</strong></td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Additional students kept</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Additional funding</strong></td>
<td>$1,650,000</td>
<td>$3,300,000</td>
<td>$8,250,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For one year - based on avg. total income/student in 2016 $16,500
National rate all Comm Bach students 18.87%
Appendix 4.3: by State and Higher Education Institution
Follow your dreams CANCELLED
A moral and ethical imperative to work out what is going on so we can provide the best possible opportunity for students to succeed.

https://safeguardingstudentlearning.net/
What do we know?
Critical differences in social, financial & cultural capital (Devlin: ‘Socio-cultural incongruity’)
Different levels of academic preparedness: well to underserved
Different proportions of first in family & equity group students
Different age profiles ...
Different socio-cultural & geographical contexts
Different institutional contexts
Busting some myths

Reject a Deficit Discourse
(Lawrence, 2005, Gale 2009, Devlin 2013)

Predictive Factors
& Correlations
Exist But Are Not Directly Causal
(Kahu & Nelson, 2016)

Stop Problematising Students or
Institutions
(Devlin, 2013, Kift 2015,)
Changing expectations?

2008 (Nelson, Kift & Clarke)

711/680 FY Law & IT Students

DESIRED EXPERIENCE:
• Rewarding positive motivating experience
• Have fun, diverse new social and learning experiences

ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES:
• Workload, keeping up, settling in, isolation, skills, life balance / life load

STRATEGIES:
• Manage time, routines, set goals, persist

2016 (Kahu & Nelson)

19 FY students

DESIRED EXPERIENCE:
• Study subjects of interest to me / being ‘better’ than school.
• Meet new people / friends who are similarly motivated

ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES:
• Being an ‘adult’, not being supported, affordability, time, skills, confidence

STRATEGIES:
• Ask parent! be organised
Learning Analytics can Help

• Works at scale and makes visible:
  • Student learning journeys / pathways to success
  • Connections / developmental pathways between subjects and degrees
  • Interventions – outcomes and impact
  • Aggregation of multiple disparate sources of information
  • The influence and impact of interventions

• Provides for evidence-based planning & practice, decision making, prioritisation of projects, feedback on operations

• ... and because good LA practices will:
  • Lead to improved sector & institutional effectiveness
  • Improve responsiveness to external drivers
Power is in dynamic not predictive LA
7 Good Practice Principles

1. Encourage contact between students and academic staff
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation between students
3. Encourage active learning
4. Give prompt feedback
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Chickering and Gamson 1987
The 'Five Senses' of Successful Transition

- A sense of Connectedness
  - Institutional identification
  - Community participation and contribution
  - Task and role clarity
  - Academic competence
  - Disciplinary engagement
  - Vocational direction

- A sense of Resourcefulness
  - Student-staff relationships
  - Student-student relationships
  - University-life interface
  - Physical environment
  - Systems access and navigation
  - Personal development

- A sense of Capability
  - Clear values

http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/tito/content/student-lifecycle-model
Conditions for Student Success

- Clarity, consistency and high expectations
- Timely support for the FYE in the classroom
- Assessment & feedback that enables staff and students to adjust behaviours
- Involvement with peers and staff

Vincent Tinto (2012)
Student Engagement Success and Retention Maturity Model SESR-MM
http://studentengagementmaturitymodel.net/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Categories</th>
<th>18 Processes</th>
<th>63 Practices (e.g.)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>4: Design, feedback and relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curricula</td>
<td>2: Designed for progress and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Techniques</td>
<td>4: Interactive, simulates SW, learning-centric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical style</td>
<td>3: builds employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>Information about ...</td>
<td>3: subjects/programs, milestones, support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Services and resources</td>
<td>3: financial, build capacity &amp; skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People rich</td>
<td>3: local &amp; central, advocacy, peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>4: inclusive, intentional, future focus, social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusive activities</td>
<td>4: cultural, diverse cohorts, int &amp; ext comm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity development</td>
<td>3: student and professional, leadership, confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Academic literacies</td>
<td>3: peer learning, skills, partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal literacies</td>
<td>4: in curric, social personal &amp; prof attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities (student-led)</td>
<td>5: fostered, aligned, monitor &amp; track progress, x-inst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcing</td>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>5: ac, sessional &amp; prof, investment, rec &amp; rew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>3: ed tech, defined, workloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence base</td>
<td>3: available, shared, evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2: online &amp; social media, clear procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning environments</td>
<td>5: formal &amp; inform spaces, resources, timetabling..</td>
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Assessing SESR Maturity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Process</th>
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<td>Teaching Techniques</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
<td>Pedagogical Style</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>Information about</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>Services &amp; resources</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
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<td>People rich</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Inclusive activities</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Identity development opportunities</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Academic literacies</td>
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<td>Integrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
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<td>Resourcing</td>
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<td>Resourcing</td>
<td>Learning environments</td>
<td>Providing</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reach</th>
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<tr>
<td>No data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little or no capacity</td>
<td>In some subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some capacity</td>
<td>In some programs/ departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerable capacity</td>
<td>In some faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete capacity or near</td>
<td>Institution-wide</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
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</table>
Students as partners

- HEA – Student engagement survey and **toolkit**
- UK QAA – Student engagement in quality
- SPARQS – Student Participation in Quality Scotland
- In governance and decision making – Sally Varnham UTS
- In collaborative partnerships to enhance teaching and learning – Kelly Matthews UQ
Enhancing Student Success in Education
Evidence that Student Wellbeing Matters!

But how do all these ‘things’ work to influence student outcomes?
The concept of engagement

“The time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (Kuh, (2001, 2003, 2009a) in Trowler, 2010)

“the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.” (Trowler, 2010. p. 3)
“An enigmatic phenomenon”
Valuable tool in examining an
enhancing the student experience
Solomonides, Reid and Petcoz (2012)

“A complex business”
Students investment in learning
Supportive institutions & classrooms
Enabling external environment
Zepke, 2013 Int J FYHE 4(2), pp.1-14
Characteristics of student engagement

1. Enhances students self belief
2. Enables all students to work autonomously & together, to build and feel competent and to
3. Builds social and cultural capital
4. Supports transition into university (the FYE)
5. Uses disciplinary knowledge to engage students
6. Considers student well-being
7. Adapts to changing student expectations
8. Enables students to become active citizens

Individual and Institutional Characteristics Influencing Student Retention and Engagement (IICISRE)

**Input / Presage Factors**
- Student Factors
  - Individual
  - Contextual
- Institutional Context
  - Curriculum
  - Institution
- Teacher Factors
  - Individual
  - Contextual

**Transformation Process**
- Institutional Experiences
  - Mediated by curriculum & co-curricular activities

**Output / Product Factors**
- Students & Staff
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Attitudes
  - Actions


“... robust correlations between student involvement in a subset of “educationally purposive activities,”, and positive outcomes of student success and development, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement and social engagement.”
Figure 1. Refined conceptual framework of student engagement incorporating the educational interface

Educational Interface

- Self-efficacy
- Emotion
- Wellbeing
- Belonging

Student Engagement

Affective
  - Interest
  - Enthusiasm

Cognitive
  - Deep learning & Self regulation

Behavioural
  - Participation
  - Time & effort
  - Interaction

Kahu & Nelson (2017)
Shaping the 21st Century student experience at regional universities


OLT Research Project: SP14-4602
Research Overview

- 8 Institutions
- Analysis of existing data sets: demographics, UES, GDS
- Case Studies
  - 110 participants (65 students 45 staff)
  - 90 hours of data collection (99 Interviews / focus groups)
- Amalgamated data – for cross case analysis
  - 7 case studies
  - 390 000 words
  - 3113 NVivo codes
  - 1934 cross codes
Framework for Student Engagement

Focus is on input and output data only
Case Studies: Curricula & co-curricular initiatives ‘that work’

- CSU – Online tools to enable joined up WPL
- CQU – Early IAR-focused “interventions”
- FedUni – Access to student support
- JCU – Peer to peer support
- SCU – Enabling pathways
- UNE – Building citizenship capability for / in DE
- USQ – Scaffolded discipline skills design in FY
- USC – WIL in non-professional programs
Work integrated learning enhances graduate capabilities, employment and career opportunities

The challenge

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) strategic plan 2016-2020 focuses on the university as a capacity builder, and this aspiration includes a specific focus on its regional communities. In this regard, one of the educational strategies USC seeks to use is work-integrated learning (WIL). At USC WIL is offered as part of the curricula for 43 disciplines across both its faculties. WIL experiences can be broadly identified in two groups: first, those that are part of highly structured learning requirements in externally accredited programs, organised as an iterative, scaffolded curriculum, for example Nursing and Education, and second, those that are required or elective courses in undergraduate programs, which incorporate a broad range of stand-alone internships, special projects, study overseas programs and other opportunities for work integrated learning. Four different types of this second group of WIL activities (not externally accredited) were investigated for this case study: Law WIL, entrepreneurship WIL, drama internship and tourism WIL. All these initiatives are established and embedded components of course curricula in Bachelors of Laws, Arts, Serious Games, Creative Industries, and Business.

Thirteen undergraduate students who were currently enrolled in or had undertaken the WIL course in the previous 2-3 offerings, and 8 academic staff with experience in development and/or delivery of each of the courses participated in the interviews.

It was reassuring that I’ve picked the right degree... They’re coming from local businesses on the Sunshine Coast, and it was that thing that tourism is real here, and if you want a job and you want to stay on the Sunshine Coast, you can do that.

The findings support WIL as an authentic educational experience that supports the development of transferable knowledge and skills for lifelong learning, employment and career development.

Key findings

The data analysed for this case study revealed two key themes: Learning Work which captured and described students’ experiences into three subthemes: crafting and practising; applying, innovating and experimenting; and developing

Influences on these practices

The two practices described in this statement focus on student motivation, skills, identity and self efficacy, all of which are influenced by the emotions students experience as they participate in university education. Both practices are drawn from institutional case studies in different regional universities that have demonstrated the positive impact of engaging students emotionally in their interactions with the university – the first case study involves a university level initiative that allows commencing students to choose who mentors them through the first stages of their university life and the second demonstrates the importance of authentic workplace experiences in students’ identity development.

Good practices at Regional Universities

These practices influence students' psychosocial states, and act to influence and engage students throughout their time university.

James Cook University (JCU) Case study theme: Peer support and advising enhance the student experience

JCU has a practice of providing incoming students (mentees) with the opportunity to personally choose a discipline-based mentor for their first semester of university study. Mentors are academically successful students in their second year or above who have been identified as positive role models. They participate in a competitive selection process and a one day training session that focuses on their role, university-based support services available and cross-cultural awareness.

At JCU, the Student Mentor Program has been identified statistically as the university’s most effective influence on retention.

Incoming students have the opportunity to meet prospective mentors on Welcome Day in Orientation Week of both semesters. On Welcome Day, mentors, based in their discipline groups, introduce themselves to incoming students and share aspects of their ‘story’ as a means of providing students with sufficient information for them to make a decision about whom they wish to choose as a mentor.

we have such a diverse demographic of people, a lot of mature age, it’s an absolute salad bowl of students, and we can always match them up..., we look after absolutely everyone.

James Cook University (JCU) Case study theme: Peer support and advising enhance the student experience

Good practice 4.1

Promote and resource mentor programs to support new students as they negotiate the structural environment of the university.
Key findings

Five key narratives about the student experience

Critical first encounters

When students encounter intentionally designed curriculum and support interventions, student emotion is enhanced and positive psychosocial (motivation, skills, self-efficacy and identity) responses are triggered.

**What this means in practice** is that curricula and co-curricular initiatives should be intentionally designed and implemented to activate motivation, skills, identity and self-efficacy.

Evidence: Of all the data collected, 46% were relevant to Critical First Encounters.

Compensatory effect

Positive psychosocial influences increase student engagement and reduce the impact of previous disadvantage and structural risk factors.

**What this means in practice** is that initiatives designed and implemented to strengthen student motivation, skills, identity and self-efficacy, will positively influence student engagement and mitigate previous disadvantage.

Evidence: Of all the data collected, 50% were relevant to the Compensatory Effect.

Constructive cycle

Positive psychosocial responses increase student engagement, which in turn increases learning outcomes, student satisfaction and well-being.

**What this means in practice** is that institutions are responsible for creating environments which engage students to achieve positive learning outcomes.

Evidence: Of all the data collected, 54% were relevant to the Constructive Cycle.

Capacity building

Student engagement increases students’ academic and social outcomes, and builds capacity for post-university contributions/life.

**What this means in practice** is that all disciplines should develop students’ 21st Century skills in context.

Evidence: Of all the data collected, 54% were relevant to Capacity Building.

Cultural change

Achievement, satisfaction and retention generate enduring changes, which can break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and therefore bridge sociocultural incongruence between under-represented groups, and university cultures and systems.

**What this means in practice** is that improving the outcomes for current students also redresses inherent inequalities.

Evidence: Of all the data collected, 44% were relevant to Cultural Change.
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Recommendations

6 for sector
3 for government
1. **Intentionally design and enact** administrative practices, including admissions pathways, **to ensure all students are able to participate fully** in the university’s formal and informal activities.

2. **Intentionally design all curricula and co-curricular activities to activate student motivation**, **build** academic skills, promote discipline and **student identity**, and **develop students' self-efficacy**.

3. **Design and universally implement** curricula and co-curricular interventions to ensure that previous disadvantage and structural risk factors are **mitigated through systematic** institutional practices that **privilege** behavioural, cognitive and affective **student engagement**.

4. **Assure quality in** learning, teaching and **student experience practices**, **measured** by positive student learning outcomes and achievement, and **high levels of student satisfaction and well-being**.

5. **Focus**, within discipline curricula, **on developing future-proof employability skills**, including advanced digital literacy, enterprise skills and entrepreneurship.

6. **Minimise the socio-cultural incongruence** between communities and higher education institutions, **through sustained attention to cultural, structural and practical organisational change**.
7. **Provide access to information about students’ movements, over time and among institutions.**

8. **Review the learner engagement scale in the SES**, to ensure the collection of data is aligned with contemporary understandings of student engagement.

9. **Review indicators in the CEQ, GDS and (proposed) ESS**, to ensure the collection of information about students’ engagement experience and skills is aligned with the key findings of this study.
So – does this hold?
“No meaningful differences were found between equity groups and other students across a range of UES scales relating to learner/student engagement, access to resources and experience of quality of teaching.” p.iv

https://www.acer.edu.au/joining-the-dots/briefings

Structural & Socio-cultural Influences

- Geographical influences
  - Time and distance to ‘campus’ poor access to high speed internet, multiple equity group membership

- Financial influences
  - Costs associated with participation, loss of income, care arrangements, casualised employment options

- Emotional influences
  - Mental health and wellbeing associated with financial stress, isolation and work commitments

- Socio-cultural
  - Intergenerational disadvantage, lack of role models, compounding impact of multiple equity group membership

Cohort Completions Analysis

- 4 year completion rate 45.1% (2010 cohort) and 45% (2011)
- 9 year completion rate 73.6% (2005) and 73.5% (2006)

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<tr>
<th>Student Characteristic</th>
<th>Adjusted R² (variation explained), %</th>
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<td>Type of attendance (full-time, part-time)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR decile band versus other basis of admission</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of attendance (internal/external/multi-modal)</td>
<td>3.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field of education</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status (SES)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional classification (metropolitan/regional/remote)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person from a Non-English speaking background</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model including above variables</td>
<td>12.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


p.7 Low proportion of variance “likely to be many other factors not captured by the model that might account for completion” ...
...motivation ... and resilience
Characteristics of Aust HE providers and their relation to First Year attrition.

Whole of sector model:

• Admission on VET basis
• Lower % of p/grad students
• Smaller institutions
• Lower % senior academic staff
• Higher % part-time enrolments

68.8%
“Improving retention, completion and success in HE”

- Investigated the ‘crisis’ in attrition rates wrt:
  - Poor admission standards
  - Students with low ATARs
  - DDS having delivered too many students

- Crisis – what crisis – facts do no support assertions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Characteristic</th>
<th>Variation explained %</th>
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<td>18.83</td>
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<td>Mode (int, ext, mm)</td>
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<td>Age group &lt;20, 20-24, 25+</td>
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<td>Basis of admission</td>
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<td>FoE</td>
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<td>SES</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FULL MODEL</strong></td>
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Why focus on student engagement?

Because, the mechanisms of student engagement:

• Explain **how** initiatives/practices ‘work’ (or not)
• Provide a design brief for new initiatives/practices
• Enhance & enrich learning outcomes for all students, and critically

• Has the power to:
  • Mitigate previous and current disadvantage
  • Help address structural challenges
  • Combat institutional characteristics influencing attrition
What works!
A rich understanding of student engagement leads to institutional practices that work.

Thank you for listening