



# How do professional staff contribute to retention and the first year experience?

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## This Session

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Why the first year

Students from non-traditional backgrounds

Study skills

Approaches to orientation

Relationship with institution

Focus on retention

# The first year experience

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Why worry about the first year experience?

Why worry about retention?

What is the connection?



## Students from non-traditional backgrounds

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“Traditional” is white, middle-class, full-time, school leaver.

Traditional students have lower levels of attrition.

Low SES are more likely to not complete – and often cite economic reasons for leaving.

Mass education needs a change in support provided.

The need for valuing “cultural capital”

# Students from non-traditional backgrounds

Feeling out of place

The “culture of academe” and “rules of the game”



## What we can do - No 1

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Recognise and value different backgrounds

Show patience with lack of understanding of institutional norms

Target some parts of orientation programs to non-traditional students

Include some activities designed to demistify

Ensure support programs aim at relationship building between student and institution.

## Study skills etc

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University teaching has not changed to meet the changing demographic or learning styles

University resources don't match surrounding high schools

Preparation needs to start pre-entry

Orientation can be overwhelming

Students can be afraid to show they are not adjusting

## What we can do – No 2

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Induction process needs to be long term

Study support needs to be unobtrusive

Facilities need to match schools.





## Approaches to Orientation

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Often too much information in the first week

Activities need to include opportunities to build social networks

Useful to involve all staff

International students need to have opportunities to build support networks and understand the culture and the city/region they have landed in.

## Approaches to Orientation

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Students not coming into first year need to be catered for specifically

Orientation needs to stretch over a long period and provide elements as needed in short deliveries.

Provide serious advice guidance about subject choices

Include material about the students' responsibility and their role in the "educational partnership".

Include sessions on academic writing

## What we can do – No 3

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Orientation needs to focus on academic, social and institutional orientation

Orientation needs to extend beyond first week and include pre-arrival and through the first semester activities

Orientation programs should include all staff

Peer collaboration should be encouraged

Students need more information about careers and subjects

## What we can do – No 3

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Students need material on the part they are to play in the life of the institution and their learning process

Students need to be treated like customers

Pre-arrival for international students needs to be more engaging

Special orientation for those coming from non-school institutions.



# Any of this familiar?



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## Students' relationships with institution

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It may be fruitful to realise we are in the business of relationship building

Until students actually need support, they often don't take notice of what is available.

Institutions are like social systems



## What we can do – No 4

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If the institution has a CRM – this can be used to cement the relationship once the student is recruited

Implement a program of frequent communication about, not only important dates, but also support available

## Focus on retention

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More than one in four students considers dropping out in their first year.

Main reasons are: economic, inability to adapt to learning style, not finding a social group, being left to fend for themselves.

Students need a seamless educational experience

Maybe we need to monitor more closely – students who are struggling need to be identified early



## Focus on retention

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Commitment to students' total well being is required.

Part of the first year program needs to focus on how students anticipate institutional norms.

Remedial programs in high-risk subjects are useful.

Most positive outcomes occur when students aren't just expected to assimilate, but their own cultural attributes are valued and accommodated.

## What we can do – No 5

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- Ensure the institution remains committed to a full range of student services
- Comprehensive pre-enrolment course and career counselling service
- Peer-mentoring program that is easily accessed
- Encourage more flexibility in offerings
- Provide a seamless experience – administrative services integrated into teaching
- Provide targeted career advice.
- Implement an individual contact program where students are contacted proactively twice a year (or semester if possible)

## Conclusion

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There are a number of things we can do to improve the first year experience and the retention of students.

Much of it does require a partnership between professional and academic staff.

Are you up for the challenge?