



# Australasian Survey of Student Engagement 2010 Institution Report





# Introduction

## Overview

This 2010 AUSSE Institution Report provides information that you can use to stimulate evidence-based conversations about enhancing students' engagement in university education. We present the AUSSE Institution Report in a ring binder because it brings together a range of different materials on student engagement and want to invite you to use these materials in any way you see fit. We hope that this collection grows as your conversations about engagement take shape. The AUSSE is conducted by, for and with participating institutions. The intention is to provide institutions with new and significant perspectives for quality management and enhancement.

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## AUSSE 2010 institutions

In total, 53 higher education institutions participated in the 2010 AUSSE. This includes 36 universities, TAFEs and private higher education providers from Australia and 17 from New Zealand – seven universities and ten institutes of technology and polytechnics. In 2010, there were 18 more institutions than in 2009, 24 more than 2008, and 28 more than 2007. In addition, nine institutions participated in the Staff Survey of Student Engagement (SSES). Fifteen institutions also participated in the Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement (POSSE). These institutions are shown with '(SSES)' and '(POSSE)' in the following table.

### Australian institutions

Australian Catholic University  
Australian National University (POSSE)  
  
Bond University (POSSE)  
Box Hill Institute  
Charles Darwin University (POSSE) (SSES)  
  
Charles Sturt University  
Deakin University (POSSE)  
Edith Cowan University  
Flinders University  
Holmesglen (SSES)  
James Cook University  
La Trobe University (POSSE) (SSES)  
Macquarie University  
Monash University  
Murdoch University  
Queensland University of Technology (POSSE) (SSES)  
Southern Cross University (POSSE) (SSES)  
Swinburne University of Technology  
Tabor Adelaide  
TAFE SA  
University of Canberra  
University of Melbourne  
University of New England  
University of New South Wales (POSSE)  
University of Newcastle (POSSE)  
University of Notre Dame Australia (POSSE)  
University of Queensland  
University of South Australia  
University of Southern Queensland  
University of Sydney (POSSE)  
University of Tasmania (POSSE) (SSES)  
University of Technology Sydney (POSSE)

### New Zealand institutions

Auckland University of Technology  
Bay of Plenty Polytechnic  
Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology  
Eastern Institute of Technology  
  
Massey University  
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology  
Otago Polytechnic  
Southern Institute of Technology  
The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand  
UNITEC New Zealand (SSES)  
Universal College of Learning  
University of Auckland (POSSE)  
University of Canterbury  
University of Otago  
University of Waikato (POSSE) (SSES)  
  
Victoria University of Wellington (SSES)  
  
Whitieria Community Polytechnic

## **Australian institutions**

University of Western Australia  
University of Western Sydney  
University of Wollongong  
Victoria University

## **New Zealand institutions**

Review of this list indicates that it covers the range of each country's universities and also includes some representation of private providers, TAFEs and institutes of technology and polytechnics. This is important, as it facilitates the production of meaningful benchmarks and provides a solid foundation for cross-institutional conversations.

## **Acknowledgements**

A very warm thanks is offered to students and staff who responded to the 2010 AUSSE, POSSE and SSES. Student and staff participation is obviously vital for furthering our understanding of student engagement.

Engagement depends on institutions putting in place conditions that facilitate people's involvement in education. A warm thanks to those institutions that supported the 2010 AUSSE.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) team at Indiana University in the USA have played a highly supportive and significant role in the AUSSE. Particular thanks to Associate Professor Alexander McCormick, Professor George Kuh, Dr Robert Gonyea, Mr Todd Chamberlain, Dr Tom Nelson Laird, Dr Jillian Kinzie and Dr Judy Oimet. In addition to their more general guidance, items in questions 1 to 9, 11 to 12 and 15 to 17 in the AUSSE Student Engagement Questionnaire have been used with permission from The College Student Report, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001–10 The Trustees of Indiana University. Items in the Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire have been used with permission from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, Center for Postsecondary Research, Copyright 2001-10 The Trustees of Indiana University.

The AUSSE is overseen by an Advisory Group, and special thanks is offered to: Professor Tom Angelo (LaTrobe University), Professor Marcia Devlin (Deakin University), Professor Martin Hayden (Southern Cross University), Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (Griffith University), Dr Stephen Marshall (Victoria University of Wellington) and Professor Geoff Scott (University of Western Sydney).

## **AUSSE team and resources**

A team of research and support staff manage the AUSSE at ACER. The team brings together individuals with considerable expertise in the design and management of large-scale surveys.

Associate Professor Hamish Coates is the AUSSE Director. Ms Ali Radloff is the AUSSE Manager. Ali and Hamish were supported by Mr Jim Carrigan, Ms Jillian Coates, Dr Alisdair Daws, Dr Daniel Edwards, Ms Trish Firth, Mr Tim Friedman, Mr Daniel Fullarton, Mr Craig Grose, Mr Darren Jeffrey, Mr Rob Jinks, Ms Wendy McGregor, Mr Luis Macedo, Mr David Rainsford, Dr Sarah Richardson, Mr Xiaoxun Sun, Mr Ling Tan, Mr David Tran, Mr Morgan Williams, and Ms Karen Wilson.

This AUSSE Institution Report forms part of a suite of AUSSE resources. Other key resources include the Australasian Student Engagement Report, AUSSE Research Briefings, AUSSE Administration Manual, data files, AUSSE Enhancement Guides, and workshops and meetings.

For further information about the AUSSE, please contact:

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# Background

## **A vital perspective**

### **Introduction**

Student engagement is concerned with students' participation in activities and conditions that have been linked with high-quality learning, and with how institutions support such engagement. These are fundamental facets of higher education.

The concept provides a practical lens for assessing and responding to the significant dynamics, constraints and opportunities facing higher education institutions. It provides key insights into what students are actually doing, a structure for framing conversations about quality, and a stimulus for guiding new thinking about best practice.

Although central to many aspects of education, prior to the AUSSE information on student engagement had not been readily available to Australasian higher education institutions. Existing data collections tended to focus on satisfaction with provision and the broader aspects of the student experience. The lack of information on student engagement has limited the potential to plan and improve key aspects of student learning and development.

Student engagement is an idea specifically focused on students and their interactions with their institution. The idea touches on aspects of teaching, the broader student experience, learners' lives beyond their institution, and institutional support. Students lie at the heart of conversations about student engagement; conversations that focus squarely on enhancing individual learning and development.

The concept of student engagement is based on the premise that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate and encourage involvement.

This perspective draws together decades of empirical research into higher education student learning and development. In addition to confirming the importance of ensuring appropriate academic challenge, this research has emphasised the importance of examining students' integration into institutional life and involvement in educationally relevant, 'beyond-class' experiences.

Measures of student engagement provide information about individuals' intrinsic involvement with their learning, and the extent to which they are making use of available educational opportunities. Such information also provides information on learning processes, is a reliable proxy for learning outcomes, and provides excellent diagnostic measures for learning enhancement activities.



## **Key AUSSE benefits**

Several characteristics distinguish the AUSSE as a highly valuable quality enhancement activity in Australasian higher education.

### Robust technical properties

- Psychometrically validated instruments
- Efficient and robust sampling strategy
- High-quality analysis and reporting practices

### Significant new perspectives

- Evidence on student learning processes and institutional supports
- Proxy measures of key learning and development outcomes
- 'Learner-centred whole-of-institution' perspective
- Index of students' involvement in study

### Quality-assured approach

- One of the world's most advanced institutional research activities
- Central management and collaboration with institutions
- Standardised survey support materials
- Quality-assured administration strategy

### New opportunities

- Cross-institutional benchmarking
- Cross-national comparison
- Data on the support provided by institutions for student learning
- Information for attracting, engaging and retaining students

## **Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)**

### **Overview of the AUSSE**

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) provides data that Australian and New Zealand higher education institutions can use to attract, engage and retain students. The AUSSE reports on the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities and on students' perceptions of the quality of other aspects of their educational experience.

The AUSSE is a quality enhancement activity managed for Australasian higher education institutions by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It builds on foundations laid by the North American National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The AUSSE was conducted for the fourth time in 2010 with 53 institutions in Australia and New Zealand. By providing information that is generalisable and sensitive to institutional diversity, and with multiple points of reference, the AUSSE plays an important role in helping institutions monitor and enhance the quality of education.

The AUSSE measures student engagement through administration of the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) to a representative sample of first- and later-year

students at each institution. With formative links to the NSSE which has been deployed at more than 1,450 universities and colleges across the United States and Canada, the AUSSE provides data that complement and extend current collections of data that focus on satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the learning environment. It thereby makes available to higher education institutions an important means for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

The AUSSE was developed to bring together existing work in the field and to leverage benefits from a collaborative, multi-institutional approach. It is critical that surveys involve validated instruments and processes so that they provide the kind of high-quality data that can be used to improve practice. Information on validation of the SEQ is summarised below. It is also critical to have meaningful points of reference such as cross-institutional and cross-national benchmarks to get the most value from reports, along with well-tested strategies for interpreting results and improving practice.

The cross-national comparisons facilitated by the AUSSE are important. While higher education is an increasingly internationalised activity, data limitations have to date constrained comparative analyses. Specifically, very little student-level and process- or outcomes-focused data is available. Through its links with the USA and Canadian NSSE, and with other collections in South Africa, China, Korea and Japan, the AUSSE represents a trend towards developing more educationally nuanced cross-national collections and interpretations.

The AUSSE is conducted by, for and with participating Australasian institutions. The intention is to provide institutions with new and significant perspectives for managing and enhancing the quality of education. Each participating institution is given an AUSSE Institution Report of its own results. The Australasian Student Engagement Report (ASER) provides a broader cross-institutional and cross-national perspective of the results.

### **Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ)**

The AUSSE survey instrument is called the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). The SEQ is based on the College Student Report, the instrument used with over 1,450 institutions in the NSSE in North America. Close links between these two instruments provide a basis for benchmarking.

The SEQ is designed for administration to undergraduate students in under 15 minutes online or in paper form. To manage and reduce levels of item-level non-response, sampled students were randomly distributed one of around 30 different online versions, each containing different orderings of the items. All students who submit an online form (around 90 per cent of all responses) are presented with an overview of student engagement and summary of key findings (see: [http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=89](http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&id=89)).

The survey instrument contains items that tap a range of key educational phenomena. A selection of these items are grouped together to measure these summary scales:

<b>Academic Challenge</b>	Extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
<b>Active Learning</b>	Students' efforts to actively construct their knowledge
<b>Student and Staff Interactions</b>	Level and nature of students' contact with teaching staff
<b>Enriching Educational Experiences</b>	Participation in broadening educational activities
<b>Supportive Learning Environment</b>	Feelings of legitimation within the institution
<b>Work Integrated Learning</b>	Integration of employment-focused work experiences into study

The SEQ also provides measurement of several outcome measures. The measure of average grade is captured through a single item on the SEQ. The other measures are composite measures which reflect responses to a group of items.

<b>Higher-order Thinking</b>	Participation in higher-order forms of thinking
<b>General Learning Outcomes</b>	Development of general competencies
<b>General Development Outcomes</b>	Development of general forms of individual and social development
<b>Career Readiness</b>	Preparation for participation in the professional workforce
<b>Average Overall Grade</b>	Average overall grade so far in course
<b>Departure Intention</b>	Non-graduating students' intentions on not returning to study in the following year
<b>Overall Satisfaction</b>	Students' overall satisfaction with their educational experience

ACER further developed and validated the College Student Report before deploying it in Australia and New Zealand as the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). A range of new and redesigned items were included in the Australasian SEQ. Validation included focus groups, cognitive interviews, pilot testing and expert review. Psychometric and conceptual analyses were conducted. This work builds on the extensive validation in the USA of the College Student Report. The SEQ is a living resource. Within Australasia it has been deployed in over 150 institutional replications and to over 600,000 students. ACER is continually consulting with people on ways to improve the instrument, and conducts a wide-range of experiments and validity tests.

A critical feature of the SEQ is its foundation in empirically based theories of student learning. Items in the SEQ are based on findings from decades of research on the activities and conditions linked with high-quality learning. This foundation helps assure the educational importance of the phenomena measured by the instrument.

The SEQ will grow with further development of the AUSSE. The form is analysed on a continuing basis, and assessed through myriad institutional and cross-institutional consultations and reviews. Evolution of the instrument depends on evidence of the kinds of engagement that are linked with high-quality learning outcomes.

## **Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement (POSSE)**

### **Overview of the POSSE**

The Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement (POSSE) complements the AUSSE, and provides data that Australian and New Zealand higher education institutions can use to attract, engage and retain postgraduate coursework students. Like the AUSSE, the POSSE reports on the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities and on students' perceptions of the quality of other aspects of their educational experience.

The POSSE builds on foundations laid by the AUSSE survey and was conducted as a pilot study for the first time in 2009 with a handful of institutions. The POSSE measures student engagement among postgraduate coursework students through administration of the Postgraduate Student Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ) to a representative sample of postgraduate coursework students at each participating institution. The POSSE, like the AUSSE, provides data that complement and extend current collections of data that focus on satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the learning environment.

### **Postgraduate Student Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ)**

The POSSE survey instrument is called the Postgraduate Student Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ). The PSEQ has close links with the SEQ, allowing for comparisons to be made between undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students' engagement with learning.

The PSEQ is designed for administration to postgraduate coursework students in under 15 minutes, and is administered online only. To manage and reduce levels of item-level non-response, sampled students were randomly distributed one of three different online versions of the PSEQ, each containing different orderings of the items. All students who submit an online form (around 90 per cent of all responses) are presented with an overview of student engagement and summary of key findings upon submitting their survey

(see: [http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=89](http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&id=89)).

The survey instrument contains items that tap a range of key educational phenomena. A selection of these items are grouped together to measure these summary scales:

<b>Academic Challenge</b>	Extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
<b>Active Learning</b>	Students' efforts to actively construct their knowledge
<b>Student and Staff Interactions</b>	Level and nature of students' contact with teaching staff
<b>Enriching Educational Experiences</b>	Participation in broadening educational activities
<b>Supportive Learning Environment</b>	Feelings of legitimation within the institution
<b>Work Integrated Learning</b>	Integration of employment-focused work experiences into study

Like the SEQ, the PSEQ also provides measurement of several outcome measures which are listed below

<b>Higher-order Thinking</b>	Participation in higher-order forms of thinking
<b>General Learning Outcomes</b>	Development of general competencies
<b>General Development Outcomes</b>	Development of general forms of individual and social development
<b>Career Readiness</b>	Preparation for participation in the professional workforce
<b>Average Overall Grade</b>	Average overall grade so far in course
<b>Departure Intention</b>	Non-graduating students' intentions on not returning to study in the following year
<b>Overall Satisfaction</b>	Students' overall satisfaction with their educational experience

Following a pilot with four institutions in 2009, the POSSE was administered at 15 institutions in 2010. Over 10,000 postgraduate students across Australasia have responded to the PSEQ so far.

## Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES)

### Overview of the SSES

The Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES) complements the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE). In 2010, all institutions that participated in the AUSSE were invited to take part in the SSES. The SSES measures academics' expectations for student engagement in educational practices that have been linked empirically with high quality learning and development.

The SSES is a survey of academic staff about students. Technically, while academic staff are the respondents, the students that they teach remains the unit of analysis. The SSES focuses on:

- academics' perceptions of how often their students engage in different activities
- the importance they place on various areas of learning and development
- the nature and frequency of staff-student interactions
- how they organise their time, both in and out of the classroom.

The SSES builds directly on the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), a survey that has been run by Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research since 2004. To date, more than 140,000 academics from more than 600 universities have taken part in the FSSE.

Compared with student feedback, relatively little information from academic staff is collected in Australasian higher education. Such information can help:

- identify gaps between student engagement and staff expectations
- engage staff in discussions about student engagement
- provide information on staff awareness and perceptions of student learning
- enable benchmarking of staff responses across institutions.

The SSES is run as an online survey only. Emails inviting staff to take part in the survey are sent by each institution to their academic staff. Responses to the online survey are returned directly to ACER.

SSES reports follow those produced for the AUSSE. In summary, institutions are provided with a customised institution report containing staff response and norms (if possible given response characteristics), and a de-identified unit-record data file containing staff responses.

Ensuring the confidentiality of response plays a critical role in assuring the validity of survey outcomes. Only de-identified data and reports are provided to institutions. Where respondent numbers are very small, the data are made anonymous, which includes the removal of demographic data.

The SSES adds a new student-focused perspective to the data available for evidence-based quality enhancement of university education in Australasia. SSES data can be used in a range of ways to enhance educational practice, some of which are summarised in the AUSSE Enhancement Guides.



## **Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ)**

The SSES survey instrument is called the Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ). The SSEQ is based on the instrument used for the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) that has been run since 2004 by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Links between the two instruments, and between the SSEQ and the SEQ, provide a basis for benchmarking.

The structure and content of the SSEQ closely mirrors the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) that is used for the AUSSE. Results for most of the SSEQ items can be compared directly to those for the SEQ. Participating staff are to respond to questions about student engagement based on the first-, later-year or coursework postgraduate students that they have taught during the last two academic years.

The SSEQ is designed for online administration to academic staff in under 15 minutes. This same SSEQ form is used for all academic staff. The instrument contains items that tap a range of key educational phenomena. A selection of these items are grouped together to measure the six summary scales.

<b>Academic Challenge</b>	Extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
<b>Active Learning</b>	Students' efforts to actively construct their knowledge
<b>Student and Staff Interactions</b>	Level and nature of students' contact with teaching staff
<b>Enriching Educational Experiences</b>	Participation in broadening educational activities
<b>Supportive Learning Environment</b>	Feelings of legitimation within the university community
<b>Work Integrated Learning</b>	Integration of employment-focused work experiences into study

The SSEQ also captures staff perceptions on student outcomes, including higher-order thinking, general learning outcomes, general development outcomes and overall satisfaction.

The SSEQ was administered for the first time in 2008. Prior to its deployment in Australia and New Zealand, ACER further developed and validated the FSSE instrument in 2008, with additional validation undertaken in 2009 and 2010. A range of new and redesigned items were included. Validation has included pilot testing and expert review. A range of psychometric and conceptual analyses have been conducted. This work builds on the extensive validation in the USA of the FSSE instrument.

## **A quality-assured approach**

### **The research and enhancement cycle**

The AUSSE survey methodology is designed to be valid, efficient and innovative. It deploys approaches which hitherto have been rarely, if ever, used in Australasian higher education research.

The AUSSE reflects a collaboration between participating institutions and ACER. While largely centrally managed by ACER, key activities are conducted by institutions.

Preparation for the AUSSE is led by ACER. It involves refining and validating instruments and systems, securing any necessary approvals, liaising with participating institutions, drawing the student sample, and despatching materials to institutions. Institutions and the AUSSE Advisory Group play an important role in shaping key aspects of survey design and management.

The AUSSE is conducted according to the 2007 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research<sup>1</sup> and the Australian Council for Educational Research Code of Ethics. ACER routinely collects sensitive test, evaluation and other data and has well established and tested procedures for protecting sensitive materials. Participating institutions are responsible for securing internal human research ethics or other approvals.

AUSSE fieldwork is designed to be efficient and produce valid results. It involves an iterative and multimodal approach, which is sequenced to maintain the momentum of student and faculty participation and survey returns. From late July to early September, materials are sent from institutions to students and staff, and completed responses are returned directly to ACER (paper forms via NZCER for New Zealand institutions). ACER prepares and analyses the AUSSE data, and produces the institutional and cross-institutional reports.

Interpreting, analysing and acting on survey results are the most significant components of the AUSSE. This institution report provides ideas for how institutions might use the data for quality enhancement and improvement. As with all data collections, it is important that AUSSE results are used in technically and educationally appropriate ways. The AUSSE is intended to provide a source of evidence for each institution's conversations about engagement.

### **A valid and efficient sample**

In most institutions efficient and robust sampling strategies are used to identify students and staff who are invited to take part in the AUSSE, POSSE and SSES. Stratified systematic sampling strategies are deployed to produce powerful, generalisable and representative estimates of first- and later-year (and, where applicable, postgraduate coursework) student engagement. These sampling

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<sup>1</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NHMRC, ARC, AVCC) (2007). *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Canberra: Australian Government.

strategies are important, as they reduce the number of students and staff that need to be approached, and build in scientific techniques that help ensure the quality of results.

ACER's management of sampling and administration provides assurance of the validity of AUSSE results. In summary, institutions supply ACER with a de-identified list of students in the AUSSE and, if applicable, POSSE target population. ACER validates these lists, draws the sample (or census), and returns the sampled lists to institutions. Institutions re-attach student contact details to the lists and prepares them for survey distribution. This same selection process is repeated for the staff survey. This sample verification process, and the conversations that surround it, is a major form of quality assurance in the survey design and fieldwork. In 2008 and 2009 it prevented administrative errors at participating institutions.

The target population for the AUSSE is not the same as the total Australasian higher education student population. In 2010, the target population included 144,425 first-year students and 176,823 later-year students, giving 321,250 students in total across the 51 institutions that participated in the AUSSE survey (two participating institutions only conducted the POSSE). In broad terms, this population consisted of:

- on-shore students in their first year of an undergraduate qualification who have not previously been involved in or completed a higher education qualification
- on-shore students in their third year of an undergraduate qualification who have completed around five full-time equivalent semesters of an undergraduate degree.

Different sample sizes were defined for different sizes of institution. Institution size was based on the number of first-year students. Up to 1,000 first-year and later-year students were surveyed at institutions with fewer than 500 first-year students enrolled. Up to 2,500 first-year and later-year students were surveyed at institutions with 1,500 or fewer first-year students. Up to 3,000 students were surveyed at institutions with between 1,500 and 5,000 first-year students, and up to 3,500 students were surveyed at institutions with more than 5,000 first-year students. A certain amount of oversampling is built into these specifications to reduce the need for complex follow-up of replacement samples. In addition, an oversampling option was provided in 2010 to assist with the generation of estimates for specific demographic or institutional student subgroups. This expanded the sample size at many institutions, with a few conducting a census of all people in the target population.

Of the 321,250 students in the 2010 AUSSE target population, a total of 175,953 at 51 institutions were invited to take part in the 2010 AUSSE. A small number of mail and email surveys were undeliverable and returned to ACER and institutions. The actual target population might be conservatively estimated to be around 173,000. A link to the online survey form was sent to all sampled students. Around 20 institutions opted to conduct the AUSSE survey wholly online. For institutions administering the AUSSE using a mix of paper and online survey, the ACER sample design allowed for 47,683 of the sampled students to also be sent a paper survey form.

For the AUSSE in 2010, a total of 39,519 usable responses were received prior to production of the final data file. This included 4,528 (6,633 in 2009) paper and 34,991 (23,988 in 2009) online responses.

The sample design for the student collection included a target response rate of 20 per cent. The secured Australasian response rate, not adjusted for undeliverable contacts, was 22.5 per cent. The response rate varied from around 5.9 per cent at one institution (down from a minimum of 13.6 per cent in 2009) to 49.8 per cent (up from 47.9 per cent in 2009) at another. In total, 29 of the 51 institutions participating in the AUSSE secured over the 20 per cent target response rate. The middle 70 per cent of institutions received response rates ranging between 17.1 and 30.1 per cent.

By way of comparison, the average institutional response rate in 2010 in North America was 37 per cent (up from 36 per cent in 2009) for institutions. The average response rate was 38 per cent among institutions that administered the survey online only and 33 per cent among institutions that also administered paper surveys.

Post-stratification weighting is used to ensure that responses represent the target population. As possible given available information, AUSSE weights account for year level, attendance type, and respondent sex.

The target population for the POSSE includes all on-shore postgraduate coursework students. In 2010, 15 institutions chose to participate in the POSSE survey and the target population included 53,252 postgraduate coursework students.

Different sample sizes were defined for different sizes of institution. Institution size was based on the total number of postgraduate coursework students enrolled. Up to 500 students were surveyed at institutions with fewer than 500 postgraduate coursework students enrolled. Up to 1,000 students were surveyed at institutions with 500 to 1,500 postgraduate coursework students. Up to 2,000 students were surveyed at institutions with between 1,500 and 5,000 postgraduate coursework students, and up to 3,000 students were surveyed at institutions with more than 5,000 postgraduate coursework students enrolled. A certain amount of oversampling is built into these specifications to reduce the need for complex follow-up of replacement samples. In addition, an oversampling option was provided in 2010 to assist with the generation of estimates for specific demographic or institutional student subgroups. This expanded the sample size at many institutions, with a few conducting a census of all students in the target population.

Of the 53,252 students in the 2010 POSSE target population, a total of 46,614 at 15 institutions were invited to take part in the 2010 POSSE. A small number of email surveys were undeliverable and returned to institutions, so the actual target population might be conservatively estimated to be around 45,000. The POSSE survey was conducted online only, and a link to the survey form was sent to all sampled students.

A total of 10,014 usable responses were received prior to production of the final data file. The sample design for the student collection included a target response rate of 20 per cent. The secured Australasian response rate, not adjusted for undeliverable

contacts, was 21.5 per cent. The response rate varied from around 7.9 per cent at one institution to 33.4 per cent at another. In total, 8 of the 15 institutions participating in the AUSSE secured over the 20 per cent target response rate. The middle 70 per cent of institutions received response rates ranging between 16.0 and 29.6 per cent.

As with the AUSSE, post-stratification weighting is used to ensure that the responses are representative of the target population of postgraduate coursework students. Data are weighted by qualification type, sex and attendance type.

The target population for the SSES is not the same as the total Australasian higher education population of academic staff. In broad terms, it consists of: on-shore academic staff working in faculties with the exception of adjunct or honorary staff, however casual academic staff are included in the population. In 2010 the target population used for the SSES included 10,866 staff.

The sample size for the SSES was calculated by taking account of technical considerations, institutional requirements, analysis and reporting processes, and survey response contexts. In summary, depending on the number of staff to be surveyed, the design sought to secure responses from either 150 staff (based on a survey of up to 750 staff) or 300 staff (based on a survey of up to 1,500 staff). These yields assume a 20 per cent target response rate. It is preferable to secure responses from at least 50 per cent of academic staff if there are fewer than 750 at an institution, and so a number of participating institutions chose to run a census of their academic staff.

The secured Australasian response rate, not adjusted for undeliverable contacts, was 21.5 per cent (down slightly from 22.1 per cent in 2009). The response rate varied from around 13.8 per cent (up from a 2009 minimum of 8.8 per cent) at one institution to 59.6 per cent (up from a 2009 high of 56.0 per cent) at another. In total, responses were secured from at least 20 per cent of sampled staff at six of the nine participating institutions.

Like the student collection, post-stratification weighting is used to ensure that responses represent the target population. As possible given available information, the SSES data is weighted by level and sex.

As with all large-scale surveys, the AUSSE offers indicative rather than definitive evidence of the phenomena being measured. Results should be treated with caution, especially when respondent sample sizes are small.



# Reports

Reports



## Overview

AUSSE results must be interpreted in educationally and technically appropriate ways. The AUSSE uses statistical procedures to ensure the representativeness of sample estimates. These adjust, as possible given data availability, for year level, attendance type and respondent sex. Several reports summarise different aspects of students' perceptions of their engagement with university education. Data files are provided to institutions via a secure ACER website to facilitate analysis and reporting.

## Key reports

<b>Executive summary</b>	A high-level overview of key institutional results which is included in the front of this report.
<b>Student report</b>	A summary report designed for adaptation and wide-scale dissemination to students.
<b>Student engagement briefing</b>	This report summarises key facets of students' engagement, providing snapshot results that can be used or converted for institutional reporting.
<b>Student engagement briefing</b>	This report provides information on key educational outcomes. It provides results that can be used or deployed for institutional reporting.
<b>Respondent characteristics</b>	Summary information on response, student and course characteristics.
<b>Response categories</b>	The weighted percentage of responses to the different response categories of all survey items. Results for your students and staff (where applicable) are provided and for benchmark groups.
<b>Item statistics</b>	Weighted means that summarise item results. Institutional and benchmark group results are provided. This report includes a 'traffic light'.
<b>Scale statistics</b>	Weighted means that summarise scale results. Results are provided for students at your institution, for staff where applicable, and for several comparison groups.
<b>Subgroup statistics</b>	Weighted means are reported of summary AUSSE scale statistics for key student subgroups and comparison groups. Due to sample size these results are less reliable than year-level estimates. This report also includes a 'traffic light' report.
<b>Annual scale scores</b>	Weighted means that summarise scale results at your institution, and across Australasia for each year of participation in the AUSSE. Results are provided for engagement scales and for student outcome measures.



# Respondent characteristics



Response categories



# Item statistics



Scale  
statistics



Subgroup  
statistics





Annual scale scores



# Enhancement

Enhancement



## **Evidence-based quality improvement**

'Student engagement' provides a practical lens for addressing the significant dynamics, constraints and opportunities facing higher education institutions. The lens provides key insights into what students are actually doing, a structure for framing conversations about quality, and a stimulus for guiding new thinking into practice.

Developing strategies to use engagement data for continuous quality improvement is an important part of the AUSSE. Information about student engagement can play a valuable role in enhancing the quality of higher education, if only by stimulating conversations about how students engage in high-quality learning or exposing students and teaching staff to lists of good learning practices.

Institutions must make informed, professional decisions about what particular student engagement data they will act on and about how to take necessary action. A series of AUSSE Enhancement Guides have been produced which present a range of ideas to help specific stakeholders and institutions make the most of their AUSSE data and interpret the results. The AUSSE Enhancement Guides are available online ([http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=4&Itemid=3](http://ausse.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=4&Itemid=3)).

As the AUSSE Enhancement Guides suggest, information on student engagement can provide guidance to many different stakeholders at higher education institutions as they have the ability to affect students' engagement with learning. There is also a set of enhancement guides which indicate how student engagement information can be used to provide information to potential students, for internal and external quality assurance activities, to help academic staff target their teaching, to understand how students are interacting with institutional resources, to inform employers about student characteristics and growth, and to manage particular student cohorts. Most importantly, understanding student involvement can be used to attract, engage and retain students in higher education.

## **Sharing ideas to enhance student engagement**

Participating, and non-participating institutions were invited to share their ideas on ways to enhance student engagement. They were asked to provide a short description of up to three programs or projects that were being developed or had been implemented at their institution that had the specific aim of enhancing students' engagement.

The following section collects together contributions received from 12 higher education providers and institutes of technology and polytechnics. We hope that by sharing what institutions are doing to enhance student engagement, institutions can learn from each other, and use the ideas gained to further enhance student engagement at their own institution.

## **A growing resource**

Collecting and documenting information about how institutions are using student engagement information is an ongoing process. We would very much like to hear about how you are using your AUSSE data so that we can share best practice across Australia and New Zealand.

If you would like to send us specific examples of reports or brochures highlighting AUSSE data, usage strategies, and particular activities you have undertaken in relation to improving student engagement, please use our contact details below. These examples will form a free, shared resource for universities and assist in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience for all students.

Please email [ausse@acer.edu.au](mailto:ausse@acer.edu.au) or send hard copy material to the following postal address: AUSSE, ACER, Private Bag 55, Camberwell, 3124, Victoria, Australia.

## **Enhancing Student Engagement at UTAS**

### **First Year Framework**

In 2010, UTAS is articulating its vision for success in first year. We are currently engaged in developing an evidence-based, strategic and institution-wide FY Framework to structure and guide the approach to FY and transition at UTAS. Exemplars include:

- a network of support for first year students that encompasses school, faculty and central personnel, curriculum and programs
- First year Teaching Forum – August 2010 - an initiative of the Student Transition and
- Retention Taskforce, organised by the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

These initiatives provide an opportunity for all academic and professional staff at UTAS, whether teaching or supporting first year students, to engage in discussion and development of the first year experience. For more information see: <http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/first-year-teaching-forum>

### **Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) Program**

The Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) Program is a free, non-remedial, voluntary, academic assistance program that supports first year students in traditionally difficult subjects. PASS does not “re-teach” the course material but promotes collaboration and discussion between students as they collectively revise and master not only the lecture content but also the study skills required to succeed in their course.

PASS sessions differ from tutorials and lectures in that students work together to learn unit content and study skills from each other, through a collaborative approach to problem solving, learning, and developing study skills suited to the discipline area, rather than be taught the material by academic staff. PASS sessions are facilitated by PASS Leaders - students who have previously completed the unit with distinction, and have undertaken PASS training. Attendance at PASS sessions has repeatedly shown a significant improvement in students’ academic results.

Data from UTAS, and both national and international research, indicate that PASS students earn higher subject grades, and withdraw less often, than non-PASS participants (in units where the program is offered). For more information, see: <http://www.learningsupport.utas.edu.au/PASS.htm>

### **Work Integrated Learning**

The University of Tasmania has an existing Workplace Learning Placement Policy and Procedure, but there is an increasing emphasis being placed on the need for the development of a broader ‘work integrated learning’ curriculum strategy across the

Australian higher education sector. The inclusion of this strategy is recommended in the Bradley review (2008) and supported in the Commonwealth Government response report.

The Work Integrated Learning Project ensures delivery of purposeful, high quality University work integrated learning programs via review of existing policy, development of new policy, procedure and guidelines and development of a University of Tasmania WIL resource website. For more information see: <http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/designing/work-integrated-learning>

## **AUSSE Institution Report 2010: University of Canberra**

The University of Canberra has recently introduced a number of initiatives to enhance student engagement. These initiatives include the development and introduction of the Canberra Award, the International Student Leadership Program and the Aspirations Agents Program.

### **The Canberra Award**

The Canberra Award is a program that, if successfully completed, leads to the granting of the award at graduation. The award acknowledges those students who undertake an active program of personal development over the course of their university studies. The Canberra Award program focuses on the development of transferable skills gained through academic work, voluntary participation in community activities, work experience (voluntary or paid), and the completion of certain short courses and activities. The Canberra Award program encourages students to become active members of the university community and engage in academic, social and cultural activities on a voluntary basis. All students are eligible to enrol in the Canberra Award program.

### **International Student Leadership Program**

The International Student Leadership Program (ISLP) focuses on increasing international students' participation in academic, cultural and social events on campus. In addition to enhancing students' engagement, the program seeks to assist in the development of international students' graduate attributes and leadership skills. Moreover, the program assists in creating a positive student experience for all international students. Students are expected to participate in a variety of activities that foster cross-cultural understanding in order to be eligible for an ISLP participation certificate. Students who additionally participate in a range of other activities, including leading and managing an event that promotes cross-cultural understanding, are eligible for an ISLP outstanding leadership award. All international students are eligible to enrol in the program.

### **Aspirations Agents Program**

The Aspirations Agents Program is a program in which current students provide peer support to fellow and prospective students from equity groups. Students are selected as Aspirations Agents through an active process of recruitment and selection and, once appointed, are required to undertake training. Aspirations Agents actively engage in a range of student equity and support initiatives on and off campus, including assisting with the university's equity-based outreach programs in schools. The program enhances the engagement and skills of both the Aspirations Agents and of the many students who participate in the activities that the Aspirations Agents support.

## **Enhancing student engagement at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic (BoPP)**

Enhancing student engagement can be looked at through a lens of proactive planning and action and also a lens of interventionist action. From the proactive perspective, safety, boundary setting and initiation of whaka whanaungatanga<sup>1</sup> occurs through the polytechnic powhiri<sup>2</sup> for new and returning students and engagement can be further enhanced through celebration at graduation.

### **First Impressions Survey**

In 2009 as a proactive strategy, we introduced a First Impressions Survey to ascertain how students are engaging in the first few weeks of their programme and what experiences they have had (good or bad) in orientation, with timetabling, access to information and feeling welcomed. This type of survey has the potential to identify potential roadblocks for students in relation to infrastructure, processes and communication. The need for infrastructure and service change was identified in 2009 and some improvements in food service and quality were made. Further improvement, especially with ensuring that students have early advice about their timetables to help them with personal planning will be an outcome from the 2010 First Impressions Survey.

### **National Literacy and Numeracy programmes**

The need for students to have a good foundation of literacy and numeracy on which to build their learning is well known. In the last two years BoPP has participated in a national project with the intent to embed literacy and numeracy into programmes. This national project has diagnostics to help both students and tutors understand where students are at in terms of literacy and numeracy at the beginning of their programme of study and how the tutor may plan to support at risk learners.

### **Utilising technology for intervention**

Through the lens of interventionist action, key tools to support students when they are at risk of disengagement are through text messaging (SMS) and through the provision of learning support.

For a number of years we've had in place a system of contacting students who are absent for anything from a day on. We started using E-text messaging in 2008 and tutors have found that this works particularly well and that students are more responsive to this than to mail or email contacts. For at least one programme team, the text message contact is built into normal classroom and practice where student engagement is high and a peer coaching system is in place. In this programme, students will automatically text their tutors if they are running late for class and if

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<sup>1</sup> Relationship development

<sup>2</sup> Māori welcoming ceremony



they will be absent and why. This also provides an ice-breaking opportunity for the student to contact the tutor regarding something personal they may want to discuss. For the tutors, it gives an opportunity to acknowledge excellence or effort on a particular day, always using the student name in a personal message; and, at the end of the last day of every week of the programme, the programme coordinator sends out a positive quote to every student. Most of them reply.

Tutor contact with students who are not handing in assignments or are getting behind is managed via face to face, phone call, or text messaging and students are offered support either by the tutorial staff or within Kahurangi, the Student Learning Centre. This Kahurangi support is provided as a one to one drop in service and also as a full in-class support process and through focused workshops.

## **Building engagement through physical activity – Southern Cross University’s Office of Sport and Cultural Activities**

Southern Cross University’s Office of Sport and Cultural Activities (OSCA) was founded in late 2006. It has built a high-profile demand driven, grass-roots service to assist in the provision of quality sporting, recreational and cultural programs and services for SCU students and staff. OSCA develops initiatives aimed at supporting an holistic approach to student engagement and health and wellbeing. OSCA is the home of SCU Sport and is assisted by funding received from Australian University Sport (AUS) and the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). It also houses SCU Clubs and Societies including 14 sporting, cultural and general interest clubs and works closely with the four student associations.

The SCU Sports Program engages students at SCU throughout their whole student life cycle. The first level is the on-campus mixed social sport program, coordinated by OSCA and convened by students for students. While this is open to all students, it is particularly important to First Year Students who have moved to the area. The social sport program helps to engage students, thereby creating a sense of belonging and connecting them with students studying other disciplines.

SCU continues to build positive associations with community sporting clubs to create a pathway for students to participate in additional sports. Again, this assists those students new to the area and encourages those who would normally engage in competitive team sports to continue to maintain their healthy lifestyle and to engage with other students and community members.

The next level is inter-varsity sport. The participants of the social sport program feed into this level by representing SCU against other universities on a regional and national level. OSCA coordinates TEAM SCU registrations for participation in all Australian University Sports Events from individual championships to mass participation events such as Eastern and Australian University Games. These events provide students with the opportunity to succeed in the sporting arena in addition to their academic environment.

The final level is the Elite Athlete Program - for the student who has made it on the national and or international sporting scene. SCU supports these students through a flexible learning program.

To further support students, SCU through OSCA is developing SCU Sport Scholarships, as well as holding annual OSCA Awards that recognises student achievements in the student life areas such as; Contribution to Campus Community, Student Leadership and Excellence in The Arts and sporting categories. It also provides opportunities for volunteers and SCU internship placements.

## **Enhancing student engagement at UniSA in response to AUSSE**

In response to AUSSE and internal student feedback instruments, UniSA has embarked on a number of initiatives to develop student engagement.

### **Major curriculum renewal – STEP 2010**

In 2007 UniSA redeveloped its Teaching and Learning Framework to focus on student engagement. In doing so three elements of student engagement were articulated: practice-based learning, the teaching/research nexus and service learning. Each school in the university reviewed their programs against a set of indicators, mapped their curriculum, and were then able to apply for funding for curriculum renewal to enhance experiential/active learning. Projects include:

- A mobile learning bus in School of Art, Architecture and Design;
- Improving simulated practice based learning in Nursing; and
- Developing service learning opportunities.

### **Program-based orientation/transition experience**

Since 2008 there has been an emphasis on program-based orientation. Students have made it clear through both AUSSE and UniSA orientation surveys that meeting and getting to know students and staff in their program area is their first priority. All four academic divisions continue to adjust their orientation program delivery to increase the levels of student engagement. Examples include:

- Two of the four divisions (BUE and EASS) run a peer mentoring program available to all commencing students.
- Across each division various programs/schools have introduced different activities to encourage student engagement. For example, in ITEE the CIS Quest is in its third year, and the QED has twice been conducted for all commencing Engineering students. These orientation activities encourage students to seek out important information in small groups, engaging with both the content and other students at the same time.
- Student 'buddies' work across every campus every day during orientation. These continuing students are trained to answer commencing student questions, with particular knowledge and skills in the areas of enrolment and the UniSA online environment.
- All divisions have 'first six weeks' websites, which introduce commencing students to important information at relevant points during their first semester, rather than overloading orientation week.

### **Embedding Career Management Skills**

A key focus of the Career Services team is not only to lift graduate employment rates through the services it provides, but also to work with and support academic staff within program curriculum to produce graduates who can consistently find work that

corresponds with their ability, education and ambition, at all stages of their career. The term 'Career Management Skills' relates to the specific skills required to identify, research and secure suitable employment and ongoing career development opportunities after university, and continue successfully thereafter.

- The acquisition of career management skills is a developmental process. Students will therefore have differing needs in relation to career management skills at various stages of their program.
- In programs where it is agreed that student employability would be enhanced by the inclusion of CMS material in curriculum, Career Services works with the relevant Lecturer, Course Coordinator and Academic Development staff to identify suitable courses and teaching strategy.
- CMS related seminars and workshops which are ex-program and not officially part of curriculum are poorly supported by students. Where possible, assessment of student CMS is a formal part of the teaching and learning strategy. The majority of undergraduate programs at UniSA now incorporate Career Management Skills.
- Students who are more engaged with their program and can readily identify employment options related to their discipline, and apply for those positions using career management strategies will often indicate a higher level student satisfaction as per the AUSSE survey.

## Improving student engagement at Curtin – Student Mentor Program

A key intervention at Curtin has been the introduction of a large scale Student Mentor program. All commencing undergraduates are assigned a mentor who is a current student. The mentor will have at least completed the first year of the same course as the mentee. Mentors are given a brief training and preparation program, and remain in the mentor role for a semester. The program is coordinated centrally, but mentors also work closely with academic staff in their own teaching area. The program was introduced in a small number of courses in 2008, and has gradually been extended to cover almost all undergraduate courses in 2010. By 2011, the small number of course that are not yet involved will be included.

The initial impetus for introducing the program was to reduce student attrition. The program has certainly been successful in meeting that goal. Anonymous mentee evaluation data are collected at the end of the first semester of study. One of the evaluation items asks:

Were you at any point considering withdrawing from the University?

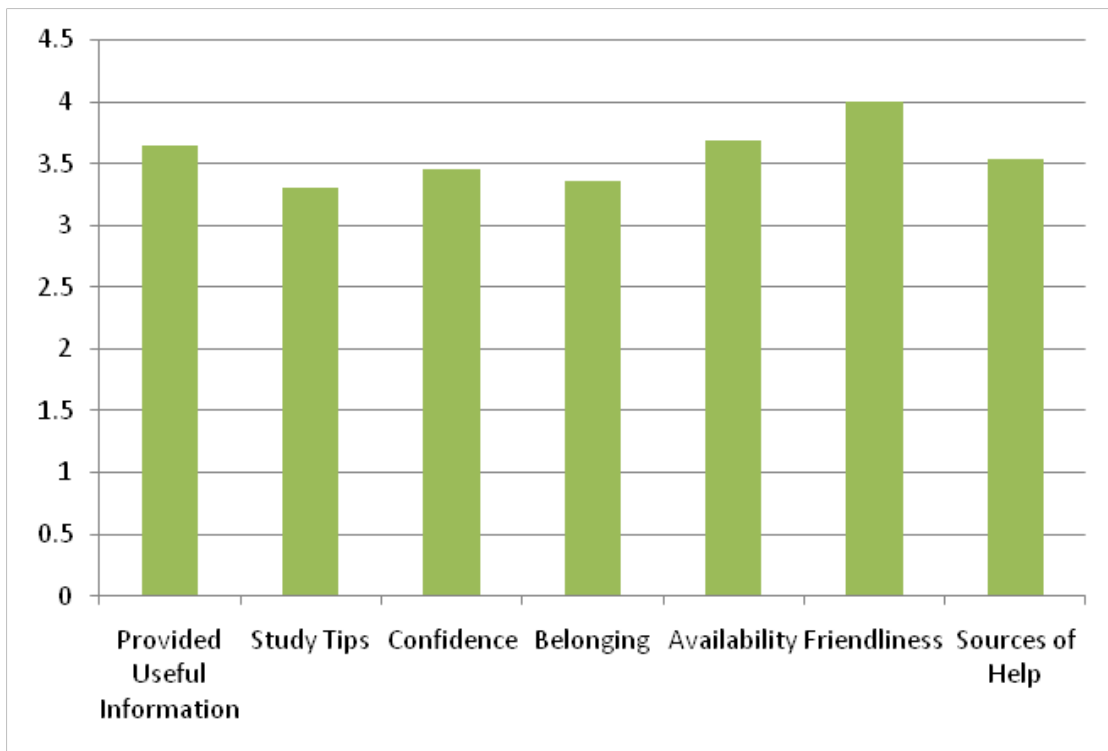
For those who indicate they had considered withdrawing, the following question was asked, with a number of response options:

Did your mentor make any difference to your decision to continue at Curtin?

- Yes, my mentor was absolutely essential in my decision
- Yes, my mentor helped significantly
- Yes, my mentor helped a bit
- No, my mentor was not involved in this decision

Of the 1632 mentees surveyed at the end of first semester 2010, 14 per cent indicated that they had considered withdrawing from the University. Of that group, almost a third (29.5%) indicated the mentor had some affect on the student's decision to persist at Curtin. If the University was indeed at risk of losing those students, the mentors have certainly been more than worth the cost of the program.

An additional benefit of the program is the impact on all mentees, not just on those who may have been considering withdrawal. Mentees were asked to rate their mentor on a five point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' for seven items as shown in the figure below (where mean scores are shown):



A further indication of the impact on new student engagement is the nomination process for “Outstanding Mentors”. Mentees may access a web page and submit their own citation in appreciation of the assistance provided by their mentor. The current list of citations (at: <http://mentoring.curtin.edu.au/mentors/citations.cfm>) indicates the significant effect that this group of senior students has on commencing students.

There is, unfortunately, not enough space here to elaborate on the other side of this equation – that is, what benefit do the mentors gain from this process? The program collects comprehensive evaluation data from the mentors as well. It is clear that mentors highly value the opportunity to make a difference. Interested readers may view some mentor profiles at <http://mentoring.curtin.edu.au/mentors/profiles.cfm>

## **Open Polytechnic student engagement initiatives**

The Open Polytechnic is New Zealand's specialist provider of open and distance learning. A major educator of adults in the workforce, our students actively chose the Open Polytechnic because they want the flexibility and convenience of being able to study at a time and place that fits around their work and family commitments. Equity of access is a fundamental principle of open and distance learning and our student engagement activities are designed to ensure they are not bound by time or place so that they remain flexible to individual student needs. We provide tutor and learning support by freephone, email and on our Online Campus, and are undertaking a number of student engagement activities at a strategic, organisational and individual lecturer level.

### **Student engagement at a strategic level**

The Open Polytechnic continually reviews its student engagement activities to look for new ways that will help our students succeed in their studies. We've recently made a large investment in technology-related projects to benefit our students. These include a number of applications that can provide enhanced services to learners throughout their study journey from enquiry to completion. For example, our new learner-facing website currently in development has course and programme information, search, selection and online 'shopping' functionality. It will also house a series of self-help tools, which will enable learners to support their own needs, access self service functions that inform study decisions. These tools will include calculators and quizzes to match student interests to our offerings, assess workload against available time, and assess readiness for online or distance study or a certain level of study. This website will also include the functionality for true online enrolment or re-enrolment that is customised to the learner or the course of study.

This functionality will also allow us, at enrolment, to identify students who will need study support so we can take action early. These online applications do not replace our current practice of giving individual enrolment advice to potential students, but will give them immediate access to additional decision making information.

### **Student engagement at an organisational level**

A number of organisation-wide learning support initiatives ensure we foster student engagement across all programmes. For example, our Learning Centre operates a proactive telephone peer support programme which employs current students and recent graduates who contact students new to distance learning, providing support and encouragement so that they make a positive start to their studies and persist. The Learning Centre also facilitates online study skills workshops for new students which help them develop the skills necessary for academic success. We're also utilising new technology in our course design (where appropriate) to improve the learning experience for our students. An example of this is our increasing use of online real-time assessments which provide instant feedback to the student.

## **Student engagement at lecturer level**

Our teaching staff provide study plans to help students stay on track with their studies, and, depending on the programme, also facilitate a range of student engagement activities through our Online Campus which helps to create a virtual classroom. This may include 'ice breaker' games or quizzes to help students feel more comfortable posting comments and questions in an online environment, and weekly postings by teaching staff to remind students which study modules they should be working on and which encourages them to ask questions.

Our library staff are invited to contribute to the online forums to help students understand how the library can support them for specific assignments. Collaborative activities are also used on some courses to encourage students to work together to achieve learning outcomes and foster a supportive culture. There are also specific programmes at the Open Polytechnic which work best as a mix of distance and contact study. For example, teaching staff in our higher level early childhood education teaching programmes run workshops around the country to support the learning materials, provide practical experience and encourage students to network with each other. Several of our industry training and trades tutors run or organise block courses to help students with the practical elements of their studies, and for particular trades programmes tutors facilitate study groups around the country to help support students and foster engagement.



## **Ways in which the University of Western Australia is enhancing student engagement**

The University of Western Australia has as a strategic priority to improve the student learning experience, which includes a focus on student engagement in and out of the classroom. In 2009 'the student experience' was a focus for the UWA AUQA review. UWA received a number of confirmation and commendations for programmes and approaches to improving student engagement. Below are three ways in which UWA is enhancing student engagement – through programmes, research, and evaluation.

### **Student Support – Transition Programmes**

UWA Student Services runs a number of award-winning transition and diversity programmes to enhance student engagement in the first year and beyond. UniStart is the University's comprehensive orientation programme for new students, supported by UniMentor, a university wide peer support network and UniSkills. UniSkills, the University's transition programme won a 2008 Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Program award for the First Year Experience. In addition UWA works with high school students through the UniDiscovery and AspireUWA programmes to encourage engagement with University life prior to commencement. Link week is held in week 3 of each semester and 'links' new students, to the ongoing support services of the University, their fellow students and the UWA community. NavigateUWA helps students to link in to all of the various services, groups and information (<http://www.navigate.uwa.edu.au/life/>). More information about all of the transition programmes is available at: <http://www.transition.uwa.edu.au/>

### **Enhancing Community Project and the Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Research Internship Scheme (ULTRIS)**

The Enhancing Community Project commenced in 2007 and examined the culture of the wider UWA community in order to gain a better understanding of ways in which it might be enhanced to improve the holistic student experience of university and, by association, the quality of the student learning experience. The primary outcome of this project was an enriched understanding of the dynamics and dimensions of the factors that influence student engagement beyond the classroom. This understanding has been translated into a set of principles aimed at enhancing community which will be used in the professional development of teachers, and by other student support services to inform practice.

Building on the Enhancing Community project, the Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Research Internship Scheme (ULTRIS) is designed to engage undergraduate students in a research project outside the classroom, in an area of teaching and learning research. Undergraduate student engagement in teaching and learning research gives students a voice in their own institutions as well as

contributing to the University's understanding of issues relating to student engagement.

### **Evaluating engagement – T&L Indicators at UWA**

UWA uses a range of teaching and learning performance indicators to assess the performance of its faculties (including majors and fields of study) and the University as a whole, against key targets and strategies contained in its planning documents and compared to other Universities. Faculties make extensive use of T&L indicators to evaluate the success of their programmes and when implementing changes and to monitor their success over time. Student engagement measures are used widely by the University and Faculties as part of the planning & accountability cycle and to inform policy, and more generally the University's student satisfaction surveys and feedback mechanisms regularly inform improvements to the teaching and learning experience of UWA students.

## **Enhancing student engagement at Swinburne University of Technology**

Swinburne University of Technology regards student engagement as a core aspect of its focus on increasing the University's performance and graduate outcomes. The 3 key projects that the University has undertaken to enhance student engagement are outlined below.

### **Professional Learning Model**

The Professional Learning Model (PLM) promotes student opportunity and willingness to engage in curricular and co-curricular activities throughout their degree. Through the PLM, undergraduate students are provided with structured range of development opportunities designed to diversify career profile, international study and work-integrated learning opportunities. These activities often motivate students by anchoring theory in real-world learning experiences, thus facilitating a greater level of engagement with their studies.

The global perspectives of the PLM develop student leadership and engagement opportunities, often in international environments. Students become ambassadors for their country, the University and their course while visiting or studying overseas.

Another aspect of the PLM that assists in student engagement is the flexible curriculum. Not only can students speed up their degree completion by studying units in summer or winter term, they can also adjust enrolments to suit other co-curricular activities, such as representative sporting activities.

This Model will continue to evolve in order to ensure that Swinburne continues to engage students and produce professionally-oriented graduates who are equipped with skill sets which are matched to contemporary industry needs.

### **Student Services**

Swinburne's Student Services facilitates ongoing activities specifically designed to harness student engagement outside of their course curriculum such as the following:

- Academic Success Program for students identified as at risk;
- Emotional Intelligence Program;
- Extensive Health Promotion Program;
- CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) Program; and
- Extensive workshops and programs run by Student Services, including Student Development and Counselling, Careers and Employment.

There are also a range of interactive support services accessible to students to assist in shaping their university careers and to achieve their learning objectives. The professional services include training and induction of students for roles on University

academic panels, volunteer and student leadership programs; promotion of student clubs and competitions; and social and cultural activities to foster better relationships between the University and its student body.

### **Swinburne Student Engagement Survey**

At the end of 2009, Swinburne University of Technology engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake a Student Experience Review. The main objective of this review was to 'explore the opportunities to increase the active engagement of students in their educational experience'. Other objectives included identifying barriers, understanding capabilities and providing future pathways for a better student experience in a collaborative approach across all areas of the University. The review included a desktop review of the current situation, student survey, and staff and student workshops and focus groups.

The review found that overall students scored satisfaction with their experience at Swinburne relatively highly; likewise for their engagement across academic study, academic support and campus life. The results were consistent with internal and external surveys held previously, and provide a strong base for the University to set priorities to improve the student experience and by way of that, student engagement. As an outcome of this review, Swinburne is now well placed to prioritise and action the matters identified.

## **Promoting engagement among education students at Tabor Adelaide**

The School of Education at Tabor Adelaide has a number of strategies for enhancing student engagement in their first year. The first is a year-long Professional Development program that begins with immersion in a school environment for one day per week, over nineteen weeks. Students become very familiar with many aspects of the school organisation and operations, from teaching and learning at different year levels, to administrative, maintenance and support functions. This is followed by a three week teaching block in the same school. This experience base assists first year students in affirming their choice of teaching as a course of study and future career, and provides relevant application for the theoretical principles they are learning. In some cases it helps them to decide early if teaching is not what they really want to do.

The second major strategy is the Student at Risk process, which is enacted for students who shown that they are at risk of failing academically or in developing the qualities of a professional teacher. They are offered the regular support of an Academic Advisor who helps them with organisation or other needed skills.

Alongside these strategies, support is offered to students to enhance their personal skills in English and Maths and in Academic Writing, through lunch time tutorial programs. These programs help to ensure that students are building on a firm base of confidence and competence in essential skills, enabling them to engage in higher learning through their course subjects.

## **UNE Engagement Model: Communicating through the student lifecycle**

The student lifecycle contains key milestones at which points specific and relevant actions and communications with the student can foster greater engagement and connectedness with the institution. This approach means that:

- Students receive time-critical information and develop high levels of informational capital;
- Students are equipped to make informed decisions about their studies;
- Students can access support as and when they need it; and
- UNE students are self-managing and engaged with the institution.

UNE has established a communications plan, using mixed media and two parallel strategies:

1. Listen and respond to the voice of the student;
2. Present the Institutional Voice.

This communication plan is intimately linked to the academic calendar and communications pre-empt the issues that traditionally arise for students leading into key milestones (such as major assessment tasks, examinations, census dates, re-enrolment etc.).

### **Voice of the Student**

Emoticons have long been used in on-line environments and have become predominant in social networking sites as a method of communicating feelings. An emoticon system embedded within the online UNE student portal provides the opportunity for students to directly report an emotional reaction associated with an individual unit or subject of study. 140 characters of free text allow students to provide some description of their current situation. Staff members respond daily to negative emotions.

The VIBE is an Interactive feedback mechanism in a word cloud. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts on a daily basis. The cloud updates with input every 10 minutes and the size of the words reflect the number of students who share the same opinion. The Vibe provides information on general issues and informs the content of daily communications with students via the Insider's Guide.

### **Institutional Voice**

YouTube delivers a series of podcasts and vodcasts to provide tutorial advice and support for the full range of student related activities. These include administrative functions from pre-enrolment to graduation and support functions and are embedded in the student's online portal. The use of this media reinforces the personalized

approach to engagement by identifying key personnel and roles within the university community.

The Insider's Guide is a dynamic blog for all current students. Trends and issues identified through the emoticons, vibe and individual contacts with students are incorporated into daily posts. 'Just-in -time' and 'just-in-case' messaging responds to key milestones of the student lifecycle and is accessible via Blog, twitter, Facebook and RSS feeds.

Custom Online Maps via Google Maps Creates a sense of physical community and reinforces the concept of the campus home-base. This also delivers signposting of locations on campus for intensive school participation.

'UNE101' provides preparatory Orientation Opportunities for new students to engage with the learning environment and to be prepared for commencing studies. This aims to improve UNE specific skills (i.e. using our systems) so students are equipped and confident to commence.

Student feedback indicates that purposeful communication from the institution to the student and a genuine willingness to hear and respond to the voice of the student are fundamental to engaging relationships.

## **Using the AUSSE to improve engagement at Notre Dame**

In 2009, The University of Notre Dame Australia participated in AUSSE for the first time. Although data collected over a period of time are likely to have a greater impact on institutional quality improvement cycles, these initial AUSSE results have been utilised with some effect at the more localised levels of the University and, in most instances, in corroboration with other sources of information to provide strengthened evidence-based insights. Three example areas in which strategies for enhancing student engagement have been introduced are for Career Readiness, Staff and Student Interactions and Student Support Services.

### **Career Readiness**

When compared with its benchmark groups, the University performed comparatively higher in the area of career readiness for both first and third year outcome scale scores. However, when compared with the University's own performance in many of the other areas, this was clearly an area of underperformance. A number of strategies to improve preparation for participation in the professional workforce have been introduced in two internship programs. These have taken the form of more in-class support to students for portfolio compilation, writing job applications, practising interview techniques, writing job applications and greater insights into industry expectations through practitioner guest speakers.

### **Staff & Student Interactions**

Although out-performing its Australian benchmark groups, staff and student interactions was another area of comparatively low performance for the University, especially for first year students. Instances where particular areas have used AUSSE results with other University data sources to prompt changes are – the provision of Campus-wide individual tutoring sessions through an Academic Help Desk, an increased focus on raising sessional staff awareness of expectations around the level and nature of students contact with teaching staff, tracking of first year student attendance at lectures and tutorials to identify students at risk due to non-contact with teaching staff, new international students being contacted at the beginning and mid-semester points to determine how they are coping with studies and their new cultural environment.

### **Student Support Services**

Albeit in a general sense, AUSSE results have been used by student support services as a basis for staff reflection and discussion sessions. The aim has been to develop a greater awareness of the potential implications of student engagement for current and future approaches taken in this area of the University.





# Attachments



# Australasian Survey of Student Engagement

