First Year Advisors at UNE: an embedded approach to student learning support

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Australian tertiary context

• Review of Australian Higher Education (2008)
  – Improvements in teaching and learning
  – Increase participation low SES
  – Regional priorities

• Targets for higher education attainment
  – 40% 2025 (25-34 year olds)
  – 20% 2020 low SES

• Student demand-driven funding/market driven (2012)
• Performance based funding (TEQSA) (2013)
University of New England, Australia

- Regional Australian university
- Research & teaching
- Undergraduate and postgraduate study
- 17,500 students
- 12,500 DE
- Diverse intake
- Majority of on-campus first-year students live in residences (colleges)

Ardidale
First Year Advisors@UNE

• Academics
  – engage in teaching & scholarly activities,
  – have discipline backgrounds and qualifications in education
  – are located within Faculties/Schools

• Consult, develop, initiate and implement strategies with students, faculty and professional staff to facilitate the transition to tertiary learning

• Community of practice
Previously

• ‘student centred, discipline specific and delivered via group work and one to one contact…and designed to primarily to meet the challenges related to tertiary literacy deficit’ (Muldoon & Godwin, 2003, p.1).

• working with ‘first-year students, subject lecturers and general staff to create a faculty culture in which the students’ active construction of the processes of development and learning is promoted’ (Belmont & Godwin, 2008, p.1).
In each discipline area

Supportive learning environment

Academic, technical, library, admin

FYA

1:1 student dialogue
academic expectations
Common activities

Working with students

Introducing institutional expectations, norms and practices

• Individual and group consultations, workshops with students
  – Academic reading and writing
  – Referencing
  – Study and assessment skills
  – Using the online environment
  – Time management
  – And also…..

• Referrals to and from other services
  – Social, personal, cultural and administrative
Common activities

Working with staff

Aligning student/staff expectations

- Promote FY pedagogy to academic staff
- Respond to requests for curriculum input
- Student referrals
- Contribute to school, faculty and university committees
- Provide feedback about cohort engagement
- Report to Faculty Management Committee and Academic Directors
Sciences

Embedded activities

Forums

Just-in-time resources

Workshops
Sciences

Partnerships

- Intentional first-year curriculum
- Team teaching

- Target groups
  - Identification
  - Follow up
Arts

Exchange students

• advise about units of study
• advise about writing and referencing styles
• provide language assistance
• proofread assignments
• liaise between exchange students and lecturers
Health (Nursing, Social Work & Counselling)

• Individual and group consultations with students
  – relating to assignments
  – analysis of assignment result and feedback comments

• Lectures for academic purposes
  – planned closely with academic colleagues

• Intensive School tutorial sessions
  – external students’ first on campus learning experience
Education (Teaching)

• Individual consultations with students
  – Academic writing development
  – Referencing and formatting, including multimedia
  – Assignment question analysis

• Tutorial group workshops
  – Assignment feedback
  – Exemplary model answers
  – Resourcing the curriculum
  – Liaising with academic teaching staff of first year subjects
Medicine
(Doctor & Medical Science Honours)

• Individual consultations with students
  - review early assessment indicators
  - design revision study strategies

• Problem Based Learning tutors
  - develop group learning presentation support for students
  - assist referred students within academic support sessions

• Academic expectations and standards
  - examination preparation
Law/Business

Many students studying cross-discipline combined degrees

- e.g. Arts/Law, Arts/Business, Science/Law, Agriculture/Business, Business/Teaching, Business/Law, Economics/Law

Law programs for first year students

- many students take core 200- & 300-level units, concurrently with 100-level units.
- encounter a unique referencing system and exam style
  - Australian Guide to Legal Citation (AGLC)
  - ‘Open Book’ exams
Law/Business

Highest % of international undergraduate students at UNE

- Majority are from China, then other countries in the Asia/Pacific region
- Partnerships with regional universities mean most students articulate directly into 2nd year+ of a degree course

FYA supports students ‘in their first year’ at UNE:

- Students:
  - Cross-cultural & discipline specific
  - Speaking/listening/non-verbal communication skills
- Staff:
  - Advise regarding cross-cultural teaching & learning strategies
Cross-Sectoral Discipline Networks (Law & Business)

- Secondary, vocational & tertiary sector educators developing professional networks across disciplines, e.g. Business Studies, Legal Studies

- Recognises that students in their first year at university are transitioning in life-long learning
Key challenges

- raising awareness
- prioritising first year
- establishing academic support as integral
- increasingly diverse student cohorts
- continuity of support beyond first year
- working across disciplines
- casualisation and high staff turnover
- acceptance as ‘experts’/academic credibility