IT'S NOT WHAT I EXPECTED: When Expectation and Experiences of First Year Students Do Not Match

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INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE FIRST YEAR
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Overview


- Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews & Nordström (2009) ‘First Year Expectations and Experiences: Student and Teacher Perspectives’ *Higher Education* 58(2) p157-173

- Brinkworth, McCann, Burke Da Silva, Scutter, Palmer, Rice, Luzeckyj, Vandellis, Pennington, Evans, Quinn, Boyle, King, Wood, Maddox, Gault, Zweck, Dancer, Minge, Barovich (2009-2011) ‘A Collaborative Multi-faceted Approach to Address the Gaps Between Student Expectation and Experience at University’ *ALTC Grant*
Trends in the First Year Experience in Australian Universities

“Enhanced effort to bridge the gap between High School and University” over previous decade

YET

- 60% feel school did not adequately prepare them for university
- 1/3rd have early reality shock when first semester marks are lower than expected
  (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005)

AND

- by 2025, 40% of Australian 25 – 34 year olds will have a Bachelor level or above education
- by 2020, 20% of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from low socio-economic backgrounds
  (Gillard, 2009)
Students’ success is largely determined by [their] experiences in the first year (Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot 2005)

First semester crucial for student success and retention rates (Macdonald 2000)
School teachers under pressure to get students into University. May lead to:

- High levels of individual attention and feedback at secondary level not possible at tertiary level (Birch & Miller 2007)
- ‘Mismatch’ between learning styles of commencing students and university teaching methods (Ternel 2000)
Common Transition Strategies:

- Focus on first written assignment (Krause 2001)
- Small group work (Leveson 1999)
- Structural equation modelling (McKenzie & Gow 2004)
- Collaborative project: IT/Education (Hagen & Mcdonald, 2000)
BACKGROUND

- What are the expectations of students commencing study at the University of Adelaide?

- Orientation Week surveys:
  - 2006-2008
  - CLPD “First year student expectations: Results from a university wide student survey” (Crisp et al, 2009)
Comparing Humanities and Science

Average similarity during 0’Week >93%
Minimum similarity during 0’Week 87%
Adapted from:
Crisp, Palmer, Turnbull, Nettelbeck, Ward, LeCouteur, Sarria, Strelan & Schneider (2009)
Aims for Pilot Project

- Gain a deeper understanding of the first year experience at the University of Adelaide:
  - Student experience
  - Were expectations met / realistic?
  - Teacher demands / expectations

- Identify differences
  - Humanities / Sciences
  - Correlate with teachers’ views
Methodology

Different versions of questions for different groups:

- **O’Week:** I expect to be able to combine study with paid work
- **Student:** I was, or would be, able to combine study with paid work
- **Teacher:** A large number of students combine study with paid work
Survey Size

**Humanities**
- O’Week: 185
- 1st Year: 111 - French and History
- 2nd Year: 86 - Classics, French, German, History, Media and Politics
- Teachers: 11 - Classics, French, German, History and Media

**Science**
- O’Week: 456
- 1st Year: 122 - Biology and Geology
- 2nd Year: 103 - Biology and Physics
- Teachers: 17 - Biology, Chemistry, Geology and Physics
Q4. What do you think the main reasons students selected the program are:

- a. Interest
- b. Job Prospects
- c. Develop Talent & Creativity
- d. Specific Job Training
- e. Family Expectations
- f. Other

- **O week**: Reasons for choosing program
- **Yr 1+2**: Reasons for continuing program
- **Teacher**: Reasons students select program
- **Could select more than one reason**
Q4. What do you think the main reasons students selected the program are?
Q4. What do you think the main reasons students selected the program are?

Good correlation between groups
Interest by far the most important
Job prospects increased while talent & creativity and training reduced
Job prospects not as important to commencing students
Q4. What do you think the main reasons students selected the program are?

Good correlation between groups
Interest by far the most important and increases over time
Job prospects overestimated by teachers
Developing talent & creativity not prized by any group and decreased over time
Q4. What do you think the main reasons students selected the program are?

Little difference between groups
Interest most important
Job prospects higher in teachers and continuing Science students
Q13. University learning environment is different to studying at high school

% Agreement: agree or strongly agree
Q 9. I provided feedback on DRAFTS of student work

% Agreement: agree or strongly agree
Q 8. I provided sufficient feedback on students submitted work.

% Agreement: agree or strongly agree
Q 11. Students have outside commitments that affect their ability to study

% Agreement: agree or strongly agree
What we learnt from the O’Week survey:

**Students know university is going to be different but they do not expect a difference**

- discrepancy between *expectation* and *experience*
- ‘mismatch’ between learning styles and teaching methods *(Ternel 2000)*
- an early ‘reality shock’ *(Krause et al. 2005)*
Successful transition is not solely based on academic ability but the ability to make rapid adjustment to a teaching environment that requires greater autonomy than was expected upon commencement.
SUGGESTED APPROACHES

- **Traditional approach:** "a didactic process in which those in-the-know teach the uninitiated" (Hunt, Kershaw & Seddon 2002)

- Require a shift towards more proactive and earlier interventionist strategies:
  - Presentations, workshops, school visits, etc
  - Online support (‘Click Around ECU’)
  - Structured academic monitoring (Shannon 2007)
Transition Charters

- Capture mismatches between course expectations and course experiences at the outset (Pargetter et al. 1998)

For example:

- Early academic orientation and advising programs
- Course-specific mechanisms for ‘tracking’ first-year students effective identification
- Collaborative learning opportunities
- Training for all first-time and sessional teachers in first-year teaching techniques
- First-year transition coordinators
MENTORGING PROGRAMS

- Consolidate understanding, reinforce key concepts, develop effective ‘transition’ strategies, promote retention (?)
  - ‘Social adjustment’ mentoring
  - Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) - Flinders
  - The Cross Cultural Communication Program (3Cs) - RMIT
  - ‘Hosting’ & Short term ‘tour guides’ - Deakin
  - Science Mentoring Scheme (SMS) - Adelaide
New Directions

- State wide approach to investigating High School to University transition
- Grant from Australian Learning and Teaching Council (formally Carrick Institute)
- Work to encompass all Faculties (Divisions) at all three Universities and representatives from many High Schools in South Australia
- Longitudinal study of students expectations and experiences paired with predictions (TERs) and outcomes (GPAs) together with teacher and lecturer expectations
Aims of New Work

- Provide common forum for the three main groups working on transition
  - secondary school teachers, university academics and professional staff
- Better prepare students for transition by communicating results with High School teachers and students as well as workers at tertiary level
- Produce evidence base to supplement current transition strategies
  - personal learning plan, future SACE, 0’Week activities
Outcomes of New Work

- Incoming university students better prepared for what they will encounter at the different Universities
- High School and University staff better understand the different expectations of students
- High School teachers to get a better understanding of what students should expect at university
- Better understanding of how TER, expectations and experiences interact to produce university results (e.g. attrition, GPA, transfers)
Current Tasks

- Re-evaluating the questions to be used in the study
- Recruiting a project manager and liaison officer
- Finalising deployment strategies
- Liaise with external evaluators

Sally Kift & John Willison
Discussion Points

- Suggested question to put in survey?
- Missing areas to investigate?
- Areas that need more development?
- Have you done this sort of thing before?
- Would the findings be helpful to you?