The First Year Experience:
First Year Working Party

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Comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated institutional approach

The *US Policy Center on the First Year of College* in its *Foundational Dimensions®* suggests institutions should (at http://www.fyfoundations.org/4year.aspx)

…create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year. These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through **effective partnerships** *among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.*

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An organisational partnership to ensure that a philosophy for an enhanced FYE is enacted

That –

- Students encounter curriculum that is sensitive to their realities and diversity

    = **engage learners in their learning**

- WHICH is supported by –
    - Adequate and **timely access to support services**,
    - Opportunities for students to become part of communities of learners = **sense of belonging**.

- AND is student facing/centred – *really!*

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What that might look like…

Aim to ensure
that day-to-day
transactions
between
learners & the
various aspects of
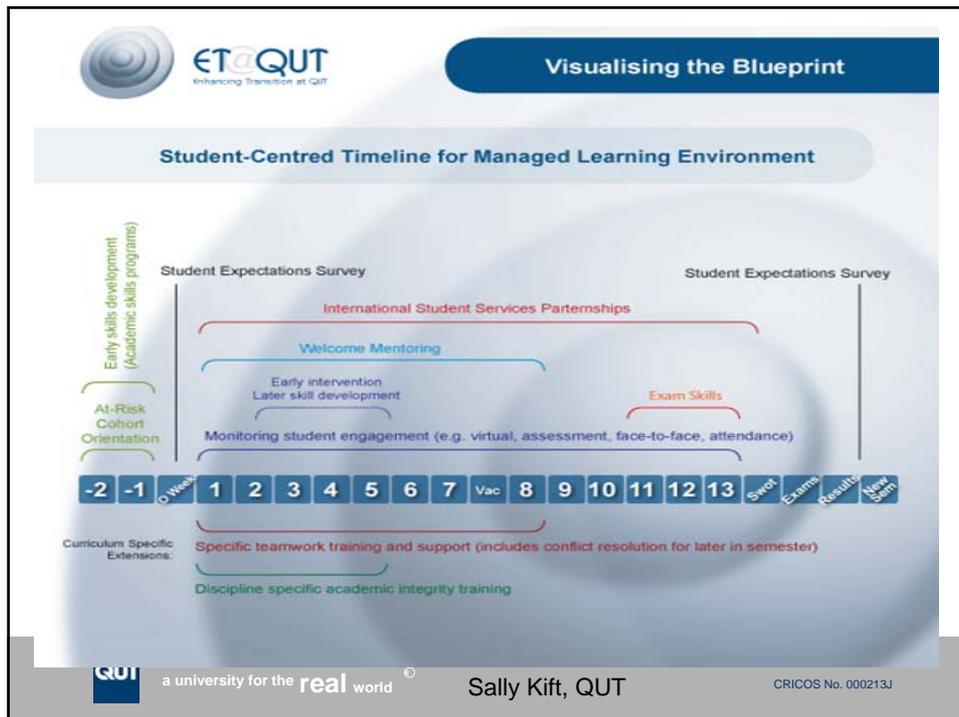their learning
are SEAMLESS
so they can
focus energy
on learning

Learning engagement

Transition student

Sense of belonging

Academic support

Timely service provision
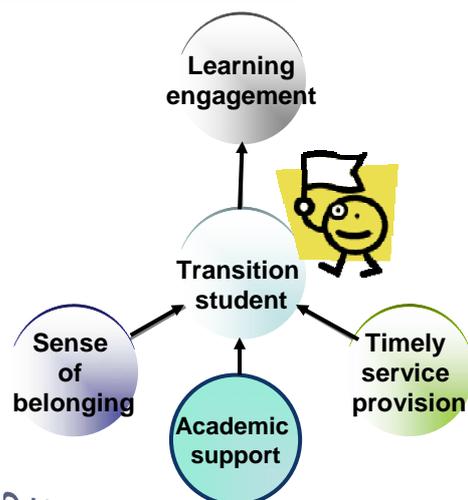
Criticality of holisitic transition approach

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My current role

- 12 month secondment to DVC(A) as *Director, FYE Project* for QUT
- 5 sub-projects –
  1. FYE Vision
  2. First Year Teaching and Support Enabling Project
  3. Pre-Orientation, Orientation and Transition Project and Pilot
  4. **First Year Curriculum Project**
  5. First Year Students Project

First Year Student Experience Project

➢ To address the institutional priority of ensuring that QUT's organisational contexts – its structure, policies and practices, particularly its first year learning and teaching approaches and all related service delivery – are integrated, coordinated, intentional and proactive so that first year student engagement, learning and success are supported and enhanced.

➢ To promote an organisation-wide ethos to the FYE, with a student-centred perspective, that is embedded at all levels: strategically across the institution, tactically in the faculties and divisions, and operationally in the classroom.

1   First Year Vision

➢ To deliver an evidence-based, high-level FYE Vision that articulates a strategic institutional commitment to a positive and successful FYE for all QUT students. This statement of institutional intent aims to provide the framework aims to inform all relevant institutional policies and practices to ensure that QUT's approach to the FYE is intentional, and that cohesive, systematic strategies are developed and deployed consistently for a sustainable, whole-of-institution engagement with an agreed philosophy of the FYE at QUT.

➢ See now "The First Year Experience" in QUT Policy at http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/C/C_01_05.jsp - QUT MoPP

For example:
A QUT statement of institutional intent for FYE

http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/C/C_01_05.jsp

A key aim is to support all commencing students to adjust successfully to study at QUT by providing a strong transition experience – academically, socially and administratively – according to their varied needs.

QUT is aware of the significant transitional challenges facing first year students and acknowledges the diversity and changing social and educational needs and aspirations of its entering cohorts. QUT believes that a positive and involving First Year Experience (FYE), **which connects new learners with their teachers and peers in a community committed to learning,** provides the critical foundation for transition to later years' learning success and career attainment and enhances student satisfaction, course experience and retention.

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2　First Year Teaching & Support Enabling

To set in place strategic organisational policies, structures & processes to:

➢ raise the status and profile of first year teaching and support among full-time academics and professional staff by aligning QUT's institutional commitment to the FYE with the incentives, workload allocation, recognition, reward and other support mechanisms necessary to ensure that organisational areas are intentional and strategic about their allocation of QUT's best teachers and professional staff to first year learning environments;

➢ ensure that these FY teachers and professional staff are appropriately supported by all other faculty academic and professional staff members and also cross-institutionally as required; and

➢ enhance staff development offerings for greater alignment to QUT's strategic priority of the FYE.

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3   Pre-Orientation, Orientation & Transition Pilot

➢ To pilot some desirable transition and orientation strategies.

➢ To recommend an integrated and coherent set of institutional processes and practices that, in an accurate, realistic and relevant way, introduces and familiarises students, and their immediate family to QUT.

➢ To ensure that QUT's transition and orientation strategies are conceptualised as a process that occurs over time; in some aspects, before the first semester commences and independently of the curriculum, and in other aspects embedded in curriculum design.

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4   First Year Curriculum

To promote an intentional first year or transition pedagogy for adoption in aid of first year curriculum design and enhancement: that is, to promote first year curriculum which, amongst other things (STAR, 2005):

➢ is relevant to and informs students' vocational aspirations early on in the course;

➢ assists students' transition from their previous educational experience to studying at tertiary level, as well as addressing the different learning needs and skills required relevant to their new discipline of study;

➢ provides students with formative assessments of their work early in their program or program component; and

➢ facilitates quality, authentic learning experiences, promotes student involvement in their learning and provides students with "good reasons to stay beyond the first year" (Krause, 2006)

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5   First Year Students

➢ To enhance organisational areas' understanding of who their student cohorts are and to ensure that they are provided with the data and other resources necessary to monitor those cohorts' progression and retention, to intervene as appropriate in aid of students at risk, and to monitor the rates and causes of attrition.

➢ To access and respond to the student voice about the quality of their FYE and make recommendations about how FY students might be better connected to each other and to the academic and professional support services available to them.
  ➢ QUT FYES (at http://www.yourfeedback.qut.edu.au/qut_surveys/fyes/index.jsp) and closing the loop on FY feedback (at http://www.yourfeedback.qut.edu.au/Vice-Chancellor_invites/response/fyes.jsp)

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carrick
FELLOWSHIPS

Carrick Senior Fellowship
November 2007-October 2008

Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education.

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Description of Project

- Curriculum focus on first year experience (FYE) across sector (disciplines **(6)**, institutions **(17)**, nationally **(all states)** and internationally **(5)**)
- To develop a "transition pedagogy" – a set of *Guiding Principles* for intentional FY curr design
- By way of –
  - Case studies of exemplars in variety of disciplines **(6)**
  - Expert commentaries from critical FYE perspectives **(14)**
  - Iterative evaluation through ongoing dissemination
  - Expert seminar of national and international collaborators

FY Curriculum Case Studies

- Law (JCU)
- IT (QUT)
- Science (Uni of Melb)
- Creative Arts (Deakin)
- Applied Sciences (Simon Fraser, Can)
- Engineering (UQ)

Expert Commentaries

- Demographics & patterns of student engagement (Griff Uni)
- Harnessing technology (Uni Canberra)
- Institutional transition program perspective (UWA)
- Staff development (Uni Tas)
- Student diversity (Monash)
- Student portfolio and careers (QUT)
- Sessional teachers (QUT)
- Assessment for transition (Brighton Uni, UK)
- Engaging pedagogies (QUT)
- Institutional vision (Uni of Strathclyde, Scotland)
- Student orientation and transition to tertiary learning (Flinders)
- Multiple entry points to FY Curr (Vict Uni)
- Peer-to-peer interactions (Uni of Auckland)
- Student perspective (Uni Tas)

Why is peer-to-peer important to FYE? (1)

- Promotes the efficacy of social and academic integration
  - FYE a major formative experience – peers can assist
  - An obvious opportunity for co-curricular engagement and interaction
  - Family & peer support **+** institutional support (acad & prof)
- Promotes a sense of belonging w/i community of learners
  - One response to increasingly **diverse** student body: where
    - Different cohorts & backgrounds can meet & form connections
    - Diversity in preparedness for tertiary study might be mediated
- Part of a supportive campus culture
  - Demonstrative of a sustainable & enduring community of teachers & learners committed to learning
  - Harnesses collective learning power of students
  - Focuses attention on student learning, support & success
    - Is a strong indicator of a culture of student-centred learning

Why is peer-to-peer important to FYE? (2)

- Can influence the nature of the transition and adjustment
  - To independent learning practices;
  - To relieve anxiety around "not knowing" & builds confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, perseverance & resilience;
  - As a mechanism to mediate expectations;
  - Provides early (peer) feedback on "how's it going";
  - Build social capital that might otherwise be absent due to diversity;
  - Generational characteristic advantages;
  - Peers might monitor for student disengagement – one tool.
- Advantages broadly for the **learning environment**
  - Provides valuable & timely feedback to teachers on their teaching & curr design, allowing for weekly improvements to be made
  - (US) NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice: include
    - Quality of relationships with other students
    - Students "tutored or taught by other students"

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