

Key Student Transition Message Slides

A guide for the lecturers and tutors of first-year, first semester undergraduate programs

(Note: Week numbers may vary, given the different timing of the mid-semester break)

Weeks 1 to 4 are a critical transition period for new students here at Western. First-year students are often ill-equipped academically and emotionally, hindering their integration and adjustment into university life. Furthermore, new students can easily be affected by 'information overload' and important key information can often be overlooked as new students are swamped with material.

The Key Transition Message Slides are an attempt to help smooth the transition into university by providing brief ("just enough"), targeted and personalised ("just for me"), and "just in time" reinforcement of key messages. In turn it is hoped this will help reduce some of the pre-census attrition and help Schools and Subjects meet load targets. **These slides should be delivered in identified 'core transition subjects' that all new students will take.**

The slides are specifically designed to be brief and generally consistent across programs and schools. Nevertheless, any essential and specific School information can be added (e.g., Nursing students need to be reminded to get their vaccinations).

The slides should be displayed at the start (or end) of the lecture/tutorial with the lecturer leading a discussion around the themes of the slide for a few minutes. Encourage peer relationships and mutual support.

You will notice some links throughout the slides. Please add the slides to the subject vUWS site to allow students to access the links.

The university-wide provision of the Key Student Transition Message Slides is part of a number of School level Institutional STaRS strategies from the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning Futures). For more information, please contact Dr Colin Clark, Project Officer (Learning Futures).

The provision of the Key Transition Message Slides directly addresses the central goal of Securing Success: A distinctly student-centred university.

Week 1 - GETTING STARTED

Please ask all students if they have completed these activities. If not, they need to make sure they have by the end of Week 1. Tell them they should:

1. **Enrol correctly in your subjects & check Tutorial Registration (Allocate+)**. If you need help, ask Student Central or your Academic Course Advisor
2. **Access vUWS & download Learning Guides for all subjects. Connect to free Wi-Fi & check your Student Email - westernsydney.edu.au – then *Sign Into* tab**

3. Pick up your **Student Diary** from Student Central, a Student Welfare Office or an info stall. Download a Session Planner [here](#) to help with assessments, reading & study time.

4. **Improve your Academic Literacy or Maths skills** with online resources or attend a skills workshop run before or during session: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/academic-literacy/bridging-programs>. It is important for students to have a realistic understanding of the maths and academic literacy skills expected of them. Get ahead or simply bring yourself up to speed by utilising the Study Smart Advisors or MESH.

5. **Tour the Library** if you have not done so already; it may be worth reminding students how important the Library will become for them. Study Smart Advisors and MESH Rovers can also be found in the Library.

Students should also know who their Academic Program/First-Year Advisors are.

Teaching staff should **encourage help-seeking behaviour among new students**. In addition to you, there are plenty of resources available and people to talk to, including Student Central, Ask-us Assistants and School receptions/front desk staff).

If any students come to you for help, you can find information on the [student support website](#).

Week 2 – ADJUSTING TO UNIVERSITY LIFE

By now students should have attended their first full week of classes.

Tutors could take a few minutes to see how they are adjusting to university life. Perhaps have small groups discuss and report back on their main issues and refer onwards if indicated. Remember, if there is an issue students are unsure of they can check out the [student support website](#).

Students should be reminded about the following:

Tutorials

Tutorials are where students have the opportunity to meet and establish relationships with their colleagues, and this can help them overcome the loneliness that many students report when they start university. Try to incorporate group activities that support this into your tutorials.

Navigating vUWS and the importance of Learning Guides

Tutors should ask students how they are finding vUWS and if they are having trouble navigating the site or understanding what they need to do/read. Reinforce the importance of accessing vUWS on a weekly basis to get their learning materials and also to receive important/urgent messages about the subject (e.g., staff illness, change of venue, etc.).

When discussing the Learning Guide, tutors should go through the assessments and assessment criteria. Students do not all have the same background knowledge, so some students' understanding may be very inaccurate.

Learning Support

Discuss autonomous learning and the importance of keeping up with weekly readings and material. Encourage student to find out about the services offered to support students. Students can get help with IT Mon – Fri, 8am - 8pm and Sat – Sun 9am – 5pm through IT service desk:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/information_technology_services/its/servicedesk

The importance of the Library

Encourage students to tour the Library and find out about all its services. They can hire computers, devices, book study rooms, as well as copy, print, etc. Most key program textbooks can be accessed in the closed reserve section.

Week 3 – IMMERSING

Questions to ask in Week 3

Tutors could ask students the following questions to see how well they are settling into their studies:

1. Are they getting into a pattern of study? The [weekly planner](#) is a good tool to help.
2. Are they using the range of study tools available within the Online Study Resources? Are they using the free study resources to help (see the slide)?
3. Have they considered to talk with Study Smart advisors in the Library or online? Have they considered attending PASS sessions? **Perhaps a PASS facilitator could be asked to give a brief talk both about PASS and their own personal experiences as a commencing student. A MATES mentor can also help with transition and could also give a brief talk?** Speak to the Project Officer (Transition Pedagogy) Dr Colin Clark (colin.clark@westernsydney.edu.au) if you would like to arrange this.
4. Are they managing their study, work, and personal time effectively? **NOTE: Has the teaching team mapped out when all subject assessments are across the session to improve manageability for students?** Particularly the first session of the first year.

Mention the [students' responsibilities](#). This includes checking and using their student email account.

Week 4 – SUCCEEDING

Are your students settling into university life?

By Week 4, students should be approaching their first assessments, but they may also be feeling a little overwhelmed.

Are your students on target to complete the first assessment? Discuss and reinforce the assessment criteria and standards (from the Learning Guide) to keep them on track. Remember to mention Study Smart, MESH, PASS, and other free study resources.

Are any of your students overwhelmed? Discuss options to manage and succeed in their studies (e.g., reduce their study load, seek academic advice, and talk to a University Counsellor);

<https://westernsydney.edu.au/counselling>). Advise the student to talk to the School First-Year Advisor (or equivalent) for guidance and advice.

You can also advise students to complete **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY MODULE** to learn about referencing & how to avoid plagiarism & collusion. The module is compulsory and available for all students via a vUWS site. All students have access to this program site. For more information, please contact the Library Academic Literacies team libal@westernsydney.edu.au

Census Date

Census date is the official date by which students must finalise their enrolment and fees each session. This includes dropping subjects, varying their study pattern, paying fees upfront or deferring their fees. Census Date is different each year for each Semester and can be found [here](#).

If students change their enrolment after this date, they will still be charged a fee AND receive a grade for all subjects they were enrolled in at census date, regardless of whether they continue to attend.

Encourage students to seek academic advice before making a decision about changing their enrolment.

Week 5 – Census Date

This week's slide is about Census Date.

Please remind your students that it is the official date for their enrolment and fees to be finalised. It is non-negotiable, except in exceptional circumstances (such as medical emergencies).

Advise your students:

1. To read information about Census Date carefully here: westernsydney.edu.au/census
2. To ensure they have gone through the Census checklist –

By the census date for your teaching session, students need to:

- make sure they are happy with their subjects and want to continue studying every subject they are enrolled in
 - have either provided their TFN (if they are eligible to defer their tuition fees) **or**
 - have paid their fees in full. Payments cannot be accepted after this date
3. To check their emails or My SR (MyStudentRecord), if they are unsure whether they provided correct TFN or paid their fees – all students who have not provided TFN or paid their fees are contacted before Census via email or phone.
 4. Remind students that if they have not provided the correct TFN or paid their fees, they will be automatically disenrolled from their subjects after Census and unable access vUWS and submit their assignments.

5. If students have any further questions, they should contact Student Central as soon as possible – via phone, in person or via online chat.
6. If a student is thinking of dropping out, encourage them to seek support and talk to University Counsellors: westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/counselling.

Week 6 – First Feedback and your Progress

Week 6 is the first week after the census date and more than one third of the Semester has passed. We suggest that it may be helpful to discuss the following two issues with students:

1. Importance of acting on their first feedback on assessments/quizzes and tracking their progress.
 2. What happens after the census date?
1. You may wish to talk to students about the importance of tracking their progress in subjects and seeking help proactively. The key indicator of their progress can be tutors' feedback on their first written or oral assessment (or in some subjects, it may be results of their first quiz(zes)).
 - If students are unsure how they are doing in a subject, encourage them to seek additional feedback from their tutors. Apart from other benefits, this conversation can help students build rapport with their tutors.
 - Use this week's transition slide as an opportunity to talk to your students about why feedback is important. It is the compass of how they are progressing in each of their subjects. It helps identify their strengths as well as areas/skills/topics they need to pay more attention to and put additional efforts into. Help your students to see feedback as a positive thing and an opportunity to learn, even if feedback and marks are not what they expected.
 - Talk about importance to act on feedback early in the Semester and proactively seek help, if students feel that they are falling behind, do not understand content or lack certain skills. More generally, you can ask students what it means to be a proactive learner and why active learning is a good learning strategy. The transition slide offers some strategies for accessing authorised help. You can add other strategies of proactive learning and help-seeking as relevant to your program and subject.
 2. The Census Date is the official deadline for finalising enrolment and fees for each teaching session:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/dates/census_dates

After this date, students are responsible for fees/HECS debt and will receive grades for all their subjects (even if they decide to discontinue). However, if there are extenuating circumstances, they might be able to withdraw without academic penalties after Census – to discuss their options, students are advised to talk to Student Central. If students have not provided a correct Tax File number or paid their fees by the census date, they will be discontinued from their subjects. If they intend to continue their studies, they will have to pay their fees in full by a certain deadline – to

organise it, they need to talk to Student Central as soon as possible (otherwise, they will not be able to continue their studies, access vUWS and submit assessments).

Week 7/8 – WHEN THINGS GET DIFFICULT – SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

(See next slide for intra-session break)

This week, we can remind students about support, help and strategies available if they experience non-academic issues that may affect their studies. According to the Western Sydney University's exit surveys and the QILT national survey, the majority of students who withdraw from their studies prematurely do so owing to non-academic factors (such as health, including mental health, financial pressures, family, or work).

These challenges can be particularly discouraging for students who are the first in their families to attend university. To meet our duty of care, it is important to encourage students to access support services as soon as possible if things become difficult.

The transition slide for this week introduces the two key messages:

1. What to do if students cannot submit an assessment on time owing to extenuating circumstances

Encourage students to familiarise themselves with ***special consideration and the request for extension guidelines***.

Remind students that if they cannot submit an assessment by the due date due owing to serious misadventure, accident or extenuating circumstances beyond their control, they may be eligible for a special consideration or an extension for assessment. Information is available here:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/special_consideration

Key things to remember: ***Special consideration and request for extension guidelines***.

- a) Secure supporting documents (e.g., medical certificate) if extenuating circumstances occur
- b) Apply no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after the due date of the assessment task
- c) Apply online or in person at Student Central and always attach supporting documents

Support services and programs available:

The slide lists support services and programs that students are encouraged to access. The central student info line can connect students to all these services and provide further info: **1300 668 370**

By Week 7, students are likely to have been placed in groups/teams for a group assessment in at least one of their subjects. They also start noticing that they share several tutorials with the same students. It is important to encourage students to form connections and networks with their peers

which can support them throughout their studies. As research show, social networks and social capital are key to human happiness and wellbeing. A great amount of learning happens not through formal education settings but through our informal networks and connections.

***Please emphasise to students that they must not cross the boundary between supporting each other and colluding, which is academic misconduct. Collusion and cheating can occur when students share with others their assessment drafts or full tutorial/lecture notes, when they copy from each other's assignments, when they write a full assignment or its fragment, do a quiz or solve a mathematical problem for another student, and so on.**

Week 8 – Staying on track & Intra-session break

This is the last week prior to the intra-session break. We suggest focusing on the following messages for students:

1. The importance of staying on track with your studies and knowing the signs when you start falling behind
 - What to do if you are not on track
 - Withdrawing from a subject after Census - **important changes in progression policy**
2. Planning for your intra-session break
3. Reminder about Academic Integrity (separate slide)

Here are some suggestions regarding how to convene these messages:

1. The slide lists the main signs of **staying on track with studies**. If possible, talk about these signs in relation to a specific subject you teach so that it makes more sense to students.

The key message to students is “Take action promptly if you realise that you are falling behind!” The slide lists simple steps that we encourage students to take in this case. In some cases, it is not too late for them to catch up with assessments and content with support from their tutors and Study Smart advisors.

If after talking to tutors and a counsellor/student welfare, students realise that they are not in a position to catch up with their studies and they take an informed decision to discontinue a subject after the Census, it is highly recommended that they withdraw within three weeks of the census date. **According to the new progression policy (in effect from 1st September 2018), if students withdraw within three weeks after Census, they will not receive a Fail grade. However, tuition fees will be still charged.**

If students withdraw from a subject after this time, **both** a Fail grade will be recorded, **and** tuition fees will be charged.

If students have any further questions, please refer them to Student Central on campus or 1300 668 370.

2. **Intra-session break.** Encourage students to plan strategically for the upcoming intra-session break (see some tips on the slide). If you have time, you can ask students for their favourite tips.
3. **Academic Integrity Reminder** (located on a separate slide). Given that major assessments will be due soon, we are reminding students about studying with academic integrity, the main types of academic misconduct and their consequences.

In Western Sydney University, we take an educative approach to academic integrity that seeks to inform, educate and support students for doing the right thing and succeeding with integrity.

In line with the educative approach, our message is that students share responsibility with staff for their learning, which includes the responsibility for knowing what academic misconduct is and how to study with academic integrity. The slide is divided into two parts: on the left, we listed good academic integrity practices and resources for students, on the right – types of academic misconduct and possible consequences/sanctions.

Ideally, this slide is to be discussed in the context of your specific program, discipline, and professional area – e.g., what does academic integrity mean in nursing/computing/science/social work/business/arts, and so on? How is academic integrity related to professional life beyond university – how does it matter for professional ethics and hence success of students' future careers?

Further activities on academic integrity:

We encourage all academic staff to undertake more in-depth activities and discussions around academic integrity in their classes. For ideas and resources, check our Academic Integrity website: https://westernsydney.edu.au/academic_integrity The website has a collection of **Resources** for educators, **including in-class resources and activities on academic integrity**: <https://library.westernsydney.edu.au/students/academic-integrity>

Remind students about the Academic Integrity Module:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/study_with_integrity/academic_integrity_module