

Key Student Transition Message Slides

A guide for the lecturers and tutors of core transition units within first-year, first semester undergraduate programs

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.

Many Western courses and programs see significant attrition between the start of semester and census (31 March) as new students either have a bad experience here at Western or simply fail to adapt to university-life in general, and drop out or even take up an offer at another university.

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 Units meet load targets. These Slides are delivered in identified 'core transition units' – units within various courses/programs which all new students will take.

The Slides are specifically designed to be short, brief, and generally consistent across courses and Schools. Nevertheless, any essential and specific School information can be added (e.g. Nursing students need to be reminded to get their vaccinations), but please keep it short and to the point.

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 ten minutes or so. If possible, telling personal stories of your own experience at university can help establish rapport and empathy from the students. In addition, take any opportunity to build peer relationships - having a support network helps students transition to university life much easier and is demonstrated to have a significant impact on student retention. For example, students who have enrolled successfully can help those who haven't. It can also be helpful to manage expectations - advise students that in general, transitioning to university can be overwhelming (i.e. new culture, new people, new way of thinking, etc.).

You'll notice some smart-links throughout the Slides. Please add the Slides to the Unit vUWS site to allow students to access the smart-links. It is also very easy for student to access the links during your talk. They only need to write the words after the forward-slash (/) and enter this at the end of the address bar on the University homepage (www.westernsydney.edu.au/).

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 Transformations); all part of the Student Transition Retention and Success (STaRS) Project adopted by all the University's Schools. For more information please contact David Roach Project Officer (Transition Pedagogies) or visit the [STaRS Website](#).

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.

1. Correctly enrol in their units.
2. Access vUWS and check their Student Email.
3. Get a Student Diary and download a Session Planner to plan and map assessments.
4. Its important students have a realistic understanding of the maths and academic literacy skills expected of them. Encourage students to get ahead or simply bring themselves up to speed by utilising the Study Smart Advisors or MESH.
5. Tour the Library; 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 may not know who their Academic Course/First-Year Advisors are, and this is a great opportunity to remind them.

Many new students are often intimidated by academics; often it can be the case that academics are the last person that students go to for help – even regarding academic issues!

For this reason it is very important to **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.

Take a few minutes to see how they are adjusting to university life. Perhaps have small groups discuss and report back on what are their main issues. You could feed information relating to academic issues back to the other members of the teaching team – and any broader issues should be fed back to the Transition Pedagogies Project Officer (d.roach@western.edu.au) for actioning. Remember, if there is an issue you are unsure of then check out the [student support website](#).

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

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 unit (e.g. staff illness, change of venue, etc.).

When discussing the Learning Guide, go through the assessments and assessment criteria. Students don't all have the same background knowledge, so some students' understanding may be very different to both yours and other students.

Speaking of which; do all Unit tutors have a common understanding of assessment requirements, expectation, and the criteria and standards?

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 MyIT.

The Importance of the Library

Encourage students to tour the Library and find out about all the services on offer there. They can hire computers, devices, book study rooms, copying, printing, etc. Most key course-textbooks can be accessed in the closed reserve section.

Week 3 – IMMERSING

Questions to ask in Week 3

Ask students the following questions to see how well they're 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?
3. 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 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 unit assessments are across the session to improve manageability for students?** Particularly first session, first year.
5. Encourage students to attend the Student Services Fare during Weeks 4 and 5. The event showcases a range of services and programs available to students, and there are also giveaways, prizes and food on offer.

You should be able to find the timetable for the Student Services Fair on their [website](#).

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 starting (or at least thinking of starting soon) their first assessments; but they may also be starting to feel 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. Consider having small group discussions about the criteria and standards and have them report back as to what they understand them to mean. This way everyone should reach the understanding of what these assessment criteria and standards are.

Don't forget to mention Study Smart and MESH.

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 Councillor. Advise student to talk to the School First Year Advisor (or equivalent) for guidance and advice.

Census Date – Thursday the 31st of March 2015

Census date is the official date by which students must finalise their enrolment and fees each session. This includes dropping units, varying their study pattern, paying fees upfront or deferring their fees.

If a student changes their enrolment after this date they will still be charged a fee AND receive a grade for all units 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 – COMMENCING STUDENT SURVEY

This slide will be sent out during Week 4 of semester, as there can be last-minute changes to how the survey is run, or even if it is run at all.

Feedback from commencing students is vital to help the University understand student experience and design strategies to successfully transition new students through this period and keeping withdrawals to a minimum.

Historically, responses to the Commencing Student Survey (CSS) have been very low and could not be considered reliable indicators. **However, since the implementation of this Slide (combined with your efforts!) we have seen a quite dramatic increase in the response rate - from 7% up to 30%**

Feedback has been used to produce results such as an improvement to the enrolment processes, the implementation of a new tutorial registration process and strategies to make assessment scheduling more manageable for students.

If possible, give students 10 minutes at the beginning of the lecture to complete the CSS on their devices through vUWS.

A link to the CSS should be easily found on the front page of every commencing student's vUWS site. All students would have also received an email containing the link.

And finally; remind students again that census date is the 31st of March.