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**21C CURRICULUM PROJECT**

**YAMMER DISCUSSION AND RESOURCE ROUND UP** 31 July 2018

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## **STUDENT TRANSITION AND RETENTION**

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This discussion was part of Yammer Resource Round Up series for the 21C Curriculum Project at Western Sydney University.

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Contributors: Avard, G., Barrie, S., Bell, A., Berry, L., Caldbeck, L., Gillard, M., Hilder, C., McAlpine, I., O'Connor, J., Pashkova, V., Peseta, T., Pizzica, J., Runnalls, L., Saheb, R., Saliba, G., Subramaniam, S., Urbach, C., White, D., Wilkes, L., Wyborn, T.

The summary will cover the main discussion questions and themes:

- Why are we talking about transition and retention?
  - Is Transition & Retention Pedagogy for the first year only?
  - Factors of successful transition and retention;
  - Where does Transition & Retention Pedagogy meet the 21C Curriculum Renewal Project at Western?
  - Sharing research and resources on Transition & Retention Pedagogy.
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### **WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT TRANSITION AND RETENTION?**

Participants in the discussion recognised that universities have a responsibility to support commencing students in their transition from school or work to the academic environment. This support is ever more critical given that at Western, many students are first in family (FiF) to attend a university.

For a successful transition strategy, support needs to come both from outside of the curriculum via effective co-curriculum support services (academic literacy support, welfare and mental health support) and from within the curriculum and teaching practices. In this way, transition becomes "everybody's business" (Kift 2009). Professor Simone Barrie noted that "transition pedagogy, backed by clever learning analytics, is the most effective and sustainable retention strategy we have at our disposal." Transition and retention pedagogy will be a key focus for the 2018 work of the Transition & Retention Taskforce at Western.

### **IS TRANSITION AND RETENTION PEDAGOGY FOR THE FIRST YEAR ONLY?**



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Traditionally, it is first-year units that engage with the principles of Transition and Retention Pedagogy – transition, design, diversity, engagement, assessment, evaluation and monitoring (Kift 2009). However, participants in the discussion inquired into the relevance of these principles beyond the first-year curriculum. Tai Peseta talked about “continuous ‘transition’ throughout the whole student experience given that students are always invited into learning ‘something’ (an angle on the field, a new way of learning, a new way of being).” John O’Connor was interested in how we can support students in transition from university life to professional life after university. Rowena Saheb and Michelle Gillard emphasised the importance of supporting the progression of students beyond the first semester, as students can face academic and non-academic challenges at any stage of their degrees. Gina Saliba concluded that the transition support should be scaffolded and continue across each year level throughout the whole degree program.

**FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION AND RETENTION**

Successful transition and retention of students depends on a variety of factors, several of which were brought up during the discussion:

- opportunities to build connections with peers (e.g., the MATES program, as emphasised by Michelle Gillard, which provides peer-mentor support to commencing students during the first weeks of study);
- opportunities for commencing students to develop a sense of belonging to the University (discussed by David White, Juliette Subramaniam, Gina Saliba, Lynn Berry, Tai Peseta) – such as, for example, early research projects that can give students experience in research in their discipline and, through this experience, create a sense of connection to the academic community;
- welcoming spaces on campus (David White and Gina Saliba reflected on how the architecture of vertical campuses is designed to accommodate the needs of students in study and social spaces);
- availability of information about support services;
- explicit and clear communication about expectations and responsibilities (Iain McAlpine),
- availability of pastoral care (Georgie Avard);
- conceptualising FiF students as ‘actors’ with initiative, courage, and ambition (Cecilia Hilder), and valuing qualities and knowledge they bring to university (Theresa Wyborn) rather than seeing them only as individuals in deficit and need of help;
- engaging with student families and communities (Lynn Berry, Valeria Pashkova); and so on.



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**WHERE DOES TRANSITION & RETENTION PEDAGOGY MEET THE 21C CURRICULUM RENEWAL PROJECT AT WESTERN?**

Overall, 21C curriculum renewal works towards delivering a more versatile and flexible curriculum structure that provides students with a wider variety of choices and is easier for them to navigate – which makes a big difference for student transition and retention.

Moreover, as the discussion showed, many 21C Flagship Curriculum Projects aim at harnessing the benefits of Transition & Retention Pedagogy:

- **PRE-LEARNING POD (IGNITE, ARRIVE & THRIVE)**, developed by The College, engages students as soon as they accept their offers, brings them up to speed in record time and gives them credit, hence paving the way for their successful transition, retention and success at the University (Theresa Wyborn, Juliette Subramaniam, David White, Karim Banayoti)
- **UPSKILLED THINKING FOR A SUPERCHARGED FUTURE POD** by the WSU Library is designed to develop students' skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity and innovation. Thanks to multiple partnerships with unit coordinators from various Schools and external partners, this Pod offers versatile content resources that can be easily adapted by unit convenors and embedded into the content of units in a *discipline-specific* way (Claire Urbach). This discipline-specific approach is important when we talk about transition, for our role is to introduce the students not only to the higher-education setting but largely to "disciplinary conversation" (Tai Peseta), and unique ways in which knowledge (what?) is intertwined with behaviours and values (how? and why?) in their disciplinary field.
- **COMMUNITY AS CATALYST CAREER ACCELERATOR WIL POD** (School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics) and **COMMUNICATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY POD** (School of Humanities and Communication Arts) embed Transition & Retention Pedagogy as they facilitate a sense of academic and social belonging and provide flexibility in the critical choices students make – the two main transition pedagogy principles (Kift 2009). Both projects, designated for later-year students, seek to engage students in inquiry-oriented experiences as a way to help them discover different communities of knowledge. When seen through the lens of Transition and Retention pedagogy, the projects create opportunities for learning that occurs in the *transition* and translation as students move through different spaces (professional, epistemological, material, and other spaces) (Jenny Pizzica).



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- **ENGAGING STUDENTS FOR COMMUNITY WELLBEING POD** by the Student Engagement Office (Rowena Saheb, Arianne Reis) will contribute to building students' mental health resilience, which in turn helps with their transition, progression and success. As data show, students often leave university for reasons outside of the University's direct control, e.g., health, work, family commitments. What can be done is to give students an opportunity to develop their communication skills with regard to mental health. The Pod encourages help-seeking and normalises conversation about mental health between students, with staff and external services where appropriate. It delivers a powerful message in support of students' progression at the University: "Not being okay doesn't have to mean the end of your university experience, but offers a new experience that you can also learn and grow from, to develop soft skills that will benefit you throughout life" (Rowena Saheb).

## REFERENCES

Kift S. 2009 Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first-year student learning experience in Australian higher education, Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program, QUT, Available online: <http://fyhe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Kift-Sally-ALTC-Senior-Fellowship-Report-Sep-092.pdf>

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