Background

The Student Transition, Retention & Success (STaRS) Program of Research aims to establish a framework within which research to build a more comprehensive understanding of the Western student experience, including learning and support needs across the entire student life-cycle, can be undertaken. The Program of Research (PoR) will inform and input into the STaRS Project, established to provide a holistic, coherent and integrated, evidence-based approach to improving the student experience, including supporting transition to university study and optimising student success.

Ethics approval at the PoR level is designed to enable sub-projects consistent with the framework and aims to be incorporated under the program. Faster ethics approval of each sub-project may then be enabled by way of an Amendment Request submitted to the HREC for approval.

Impact evaluation of such transition and retention strategies is required by the University and the PoR offers the opportunity to turn this into published research.

Aims of the STaRS Program of Research

The aim of this PoR is to establish a framework for research into the student experience and their transition in order to:

1. Facilitate and support research and scholarship into this vital area;
2. Achieve a more comprehensive understanding of students experience and needs;
3. Ascertain the contributing factors that may be unique to particular cohorts, clusters and demographic groups within the study body, which may impact on student transition, retention, and outcomes achieved;
4. Inform the Institution in its supportive strategies, so as to be more targeted in meeting the needs of its students across the University, within a whole of student lifecycle approach;
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed and implemented across the University.

What the STaRS Program of Research covers:

Approval under the STaRS PoR has been gained for the use of the following data sources as de-identified data:

- Student progress rates in units and courses;
- Grades;
- Commencing student retention rates;
- Quantitative and qualitative evaluative data, such as Student Feedback on Units;
Demographic data gathered at enrolment, such as low SES status, First in Family status, basis of admission (current school leaver, non-current school leaver categories such as TAFE articulation etc., HSC performance in specific subjects);

Course preference data.

Incorporation of Sub-Project Initiatives

Ethics Approval

Researchers wishing to conduct studies which will contribute to the broad aims of the STaRS PoR can submit a proposal to run a sub-project under the STaRS umbrella.

Each sub-project requesting approval under the STaRS PoR must include the following documents:

1. STaRS PoR HREC Amendment Request TEMPLATE
2. STaRS_Program of Research_Sub-project application form_vFeb2014 v2

In addition to any attachments such as Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms, Interview Schedules, etc.

Once approved, your project details will be recorded by STaRS, who will then submit to Human Ethics. If your project runs over one year in length, you will be required to submit brief annual progress reports to STaRS which will be incorporated into the annual HREC report required for the STaRS umbrella project. A brief description of the sub-project will be included on the STaRS Research webpage.

On conclusion of your project you will be required to submit a final ethics report form and a 1-2 page summary of your research findings to STaRS. Any publications resulting from your research should also be forwarded to STaRS so a copy can be kept on record and made publicly available on the STaRS website. After approval of your final project report by the STaRS research team, your final report will also be submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data management

In developing your sub-project proposal, it is important to note that you will be required to adhere to the STaRS opt out process when contacting students. Depending on students’ expressed opt-out preference, this means that:

1. Students who have opted-out of their data being accessed will not have their data included in the sub-project;
2. Students who have opted-out of being eligible to be contacted and invited to participate in sub-projects will not be included in sub-project samples or population;
3. Both of the above where they have opted-out of both 1 and 2 above.

The lead investigator for each sub-project will have responsibility for:

- Ensuring to cross-reference their sub-project target population database with the PoR “opt out” student register, ensuring those students who had opted out at PoR level are identified and coded correctly in the sub-project database so that a) their data is not included in the sub-project and/or b) they are not contacted to participate in interviews/focus groups. This
is done by submitting a spreadsheet containing the target population to STaRS who will then remove the students who have opted out;

- Recording details of the student population that are contacted and choose not to participate during the duration of the sub-project. A record of participants and non-participants must be developed and maintained, including those students who opt-out during the research project.

- Providing the STaRS with a final sub-project database at the end of data collection which will be used to cross match with the student opt-out register to ensure students are not contacted multiple times for future sub-projects. It will also be maintained for auditing purposes.

Whilst student participants may not have opted out at commencement of their studies following the first-notification email, sub-project teams must ensure that they have the opportunity to opt out at any point in the sub-project.