

# Editorial

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## 2023 STARS Conference

In 2023 the STARS Conference was run in conjunction with the Australian Mental Health in Higher Education Collaboration (AMHHEC). As always, the Conference provided us with opportunities to learn together and share our diverse expertise, experiences and knowledge – all grounded and guided by our collective commitment to, and passion for, enhancing the student experience and student learning success.

There are many synergies associated with this year's partnership with AMHHEC which includes our shared interests in staff and student wellbeing, and our aspirations to better support students succeed and flourish while undertaking tertiary studies. As we slowly recover from the disruption and turmoil caused by COVID, this Conference is a vital opportunity to come together as a coalition of scholars, students and community members, to share and discuss issues of concern, and also celebrate stories that have brought about positive change.

This special issue brings together the accepted peer-reviewed articles and a selected practice report from the 2023 STARS Conference. We are also pleased to include a feature article from Vincent Tinto (more below). Over three days (3-5 July) the STARS Conference community heard from two keynote speakers and one plenary panel on student and staff wellbeing, participated in 75 concurrent presentations (Emerging Initiatives and Good Practice Reports) and enjoyed the always popular poster sessions.

The aim of the Conference remains unchanged: *To create a collegial conference environment in which we can inspire and motivate each other to remain student-centred in all our endeavours and to maintain a positive professional identity as professionals in the higher education sector internationally.*

## Feature Article

The Editorial team are very pleased to be publishing a paper from the Journal Advisory Board member **Vincent Tinto**. Vincent Tinto is a Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at Syracuse University, US. Back in 2017 this Journal published *Reflections on Student Persistence* (Tinto, 2017) addressing the importance of student persistence, self-efficacy and building the sense of belonging within their own institutional communities. In this issue, Professor Tinto brings us back to discussions on student engagement and its impact on student success. In *Reflections: Rethinking Engagement and Student Persistence* we are reminded that student engagement remains complex and now, more than ever before, our institutions should not “leave engagement to chance” (p. 5).



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## Articles

From the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, **Ellie Kay and Paul Bostock** assesses the impact of a pan-institution Early Alert System that utilises nudging when students are at risk of disengagement. Their findings support the work Lawrence et al. (2021) who have examined the value of appropriate nudging to improve student engagement.

The findings from a National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) funded project that focused on “what works” to support Indigenous students to complete their degrees are scrutinised by **Bronwyn Fredericks, Katelyn Barney, Tracey Bunda, Kirsten Hausia, Anne Martin and Brenna Bernardino**. While universities across Australia are committed to improving participation in higher education, Indigenous students continue to experience racism in university classrooms. The authors call for further Indigenisation of the curriculum to improve Indigenous student completion rates.

**Tracy Goodchild, Georgina Heath and Amanda Richardson** explore changes in resilience following the delivery of a resilience building module within a core first-year university course. Psychology students at the University of South Australia completed the adapted Resilience at Work Scale at two separate time points and undertook a resilience building module. The authors note that resilience building should be considered a core skill by universities and encourage staff to look for opportunities “both within and outside of the curriculum to support students to have the best start possible” (p. 38).

## Practice Report

Enabling programs in Australia provide non-traditional students with entry pathways into university, equipping them with the skills to access and participate successfully in undergraduate study. **Charmaine Davis, Suzi Syme, Chris Cook, Sarah Dempster, Lisa Duffy, Sarah Hattam, George Lambrinidis, Kathy Lawson and Stuart Levy** build on a previous study by Syme, Davis et al., (2021), on an established benchmarking framework and the use of templates to compare the learning outcomes, curriculum, and standards of achievement.

The report outlines the results of the first comprehensive cross-institutional benchmarking project involving nine Australian universities and demonstrates that there is shared understanding of the standards of enabling programs between institutions.

## John Clarke

Finally, we remember our colleague and one of the founding editors of *Student Success* John Clarke. The editorial team include a reflective piece in this issue and are very proud to continue his work to enable the dissemination of quality research into the student experience in higher education.

## References

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