

## Editorial

### Recognition of best practice

The ethos of *Student Success* includes our commitment to focus on, share and promote good practice in student learning experiences in the tertiary sector. In June this year, both the *Student Success* Journal and the annual [STARS Conference](#) were recognised and cited in the Australian Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP)<sup>1</sup> Discussion Paper on *Improving Completion, Retention and Success in Higher Education* (Department of Education and Training, 2017) for the work we do “sharing best practice” across the higher education sector in Australia (p. 51). For the Editors of the Journal and the Conference Committee, this recognition was very pleasing and strongly reflects the good work of our authors which includes: robust research, scholarship, good practice, inspirational innovations and student-centred knowledge that will continue to be shared through the Conference and in this Journal.



### In this Special Issue

The *Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success* (STARS) Conference, held in Adelaide, South Australia (July 2-5, 2017), is now fully established as a collegial, collaborative and inclusive forum. More than 300 delegates—a mix of professional, academic and administrative practitioners and leaders—attended and participated in a range of presentations and activities which included, Refereed papers, Good Practice Reports and Emerging Initiatives, along with Poster Presentations, Special Interest Groups, Workshops and STARS Network meetings. The STARS Networks, as communities of practice, now number eight and include: First-in-Family Network; First Year Experience Network; Peer2Peer Alliances Network; Psychological Well-being Network; Sharing Ideas, Resources and Experiences Network; STEM Network; Student Equity Network; and the Transition-Out Network.

The Conference Keynote, delivered by Thomas C Reeves, Professor Emeritus of Learning, Design, and Technology in the College of Education at the University of Georgia, USA challenged us to think deeply and differently about the important role conative processes play in student success. We were delighted by Tom’s presence and insights as well as his generous comments endorsing the Conference.

This year’s plenary panel of higher education leaders was facilitated by Professor Ron Oliver, recently of Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia and welcomed Professor Philippa Levy (Pro Vice-Chancellor - Student

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<sup>1</sup> HESP is a legislative advisory body, established under the [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#), (TEQSA Act), with responsibility related to the standards for delivery of higher education in Australia.

Learning) University of Adelaide, Professor Clare Pollock (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Students & Academic) Flinders University, Professor Marie Wilson (Pro Vice-Chancellor Business and Law) University of South Australia, and Doug Cole (Head of Global Employability and Enterprise) UK Higher Education Academy (HEA). With reference to the HEA student success framework, each of these leaders spoke about key student experience initiatives in each of their South Australian universities and answered questions from the floor.

The concluding formal session provided one of the many highlights of the Conference: An Ecological Approach to Promoting Student Well-Being. Convened by Conference Co-Chair Professor Rachael Field (Bond University), the panel adopted a Q&A format allowing delegates an opportunity to engage with and interrogate diverse perspectives on curricular and co-curricular approaches to promoting student and staff well-being in tertiary environments.

As is customary, this issue of the Journal publishes the top ranked research papers selected via the blind peer review process and a selection of the highest quality *Emerging Initiatives* selected by the Conference Program Committee. Each of these submissions is described below.

## Feature

We are delighted to feature in our special Conference issue—*Reflections on Student Persistence*—prepared by **Professor Vincent Tinto, Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at Syracuse University, USA**. Vincent is a long-time friend and supporter of STARS and its predecessor FYHE Conferences and Journal and a member of this Journal's International Advisory Board. In his article, Vincent explores the case for motivation to be considered as a significant aspect of the tertiary student psyche by drawing on theoretical frameworks, research and practical experiences related to the issue. His personal reflection is informed by his many years of outstanding contributions to higher education and the influence he has had as someone who has been a global advocate for enhancing the student experience. It is a timely piece which highlights the breadth and profundity of the presentations at this year's conference in Adelaide, Australia where the success of students, in all their diversity, are the reason we come together annually to focus on enhancing their experiences in post-secondary education.

## Articles

From Monash College in Melbourne, Australia, **Kate Hughes** explores the habitus of neoliberal universities, the position of the teaching academic workforce, and the ways in which transition pedagogies offer a disruptive intervention. In *Transition pedagogies and the neoliberal episteme: What do academics think?* Kate offers an account of transition pedagogies themselves and provides some revealing, evaluative accounts from academics experienced in the use of these pedagogies with largely first-in-family students. Kate concludes by proposing that, despite the fiscal, formal and structural alterations of universities, it is possible to create learning spaces where students can engage critically with their world.

First year students are the focus of **Ella Kahu, Karen Nelson** and **Catherine Picton** from the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia, whose qualitative study of a group of students in their first year found that a higher education which is relevant to students' interests and future goals, is critical to student success and retention. *Student interest as a key driver of engagement for first year students* highlights the importance of perceived relevance, i.e. when students believe that what they are doing is important to their studies and future profession, they are more engaged.

Also focussing on the first year, but from the staff perspective, in *Distributed and collaborative: Experiences of local leadership of a first-year experience program*, **Jo McKenzie** and **Kathy Egea** from University of Technology Sydney (UTS) discuss ways local leadership is experienced at the faculty level in an institutional FYE program, which they investigated using interviews with faculty coordinators and small grant recipients. *Student Success* has profiled the evolution of the UTS FYE program previously ([Egea, Griffiths & McKenzie, 2014](#); [McKenzie & Egea, 2016](#)) and this paper examines the faculty differences in local leadership activity, indicating that a sense of belonging is just as essential for staff who are seeking to encourage belonging in students.

**Ryan Naylor** from La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia contends there is a gap between student-derived and academic-derived conceptions of what constitutes success at university. In *First year student conceptions of success: What really matters?* Ryan investigates students' attitudes about the factors that contribute to a successful student experience, using a modification of the theoretical framework developed by Coates, Kelly and Naylor (2016). Naylor also compares the effect of two different rating methodologies (Likert-

style and quadratic voting) on student responses and presents the conceptual outcomes for investigating new methodologies and frameworks for the field, as well as empirical outcomes in our understanding of student expectations.

Extra-curricular activity to create a sense of belonging for students not living on campus is the subject of *Building a sense of belonging among tertiary commuter students: The Monash Non-Residential Colleges program*. **Adam Fernandes, Allie Ford, Gerry Rayner and Lynette Pretorius** from Monash University outline a program actually based on the model used by the university's residential services and aimed at providing similar levels of pastoral and social support to students from off-campus. Volunteer advisors form the core of each college cohort and the program has continued to expand, fostering a sense of community through informal and formal events (e.g. sporting competitions, balls and dinners).

From Flinders University in South Australia, **Masha Smallhorn** addresses the decline in second year lecture attendance with a project designed to address transition by changing from a traditional teaching model to a flipped classroom model. *The flipped classroom: A learning model to increase student engagement not academic achievement* investigates the impact of this model on student engagement, attitude, achievement and success through analysing results of surveys, attendance records, learning analytics, exam scores and topic grades.

## Practice Reports

A significant component of the STARS Conference program is the presentation of *Emerging Initiatives*. These presentations allow for new ideas, early stage initiatives or pilot programs to be discussed. Audience participation is encouraged after a brief presentation which focuses on the sharing of experiences and collaborative discussion. The selected Emerging Initiatives from the STARS Conference display the breadth of approaches to student engagement and the diversity of the cohort at the centre of projects and programs.

From Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, **Victoria Menzies** and **Jennifer Tredinnick** applied a blended and flipped classroom pedagogical model to the training of peer leaders involved in an institutional peer programs strategy. In *Flipped peer leader training: A modularised, blended and active peer leader training and development program*, ongoing evaluation of the training approach has identified

challenges that recognise the value of face-to-face activities and ultimately the value this adds to the learner experience.

Institution-wide pedagogical reform at an elite university in Ireland is explored by **Michelle Share** and **Ciara O'Farrell**, from Trinity College at the University of Dublin in *Can you teach an old dog new tricks? Institution-wide pedagogical reform at an elite university in Ireland*. Michelle and Ciara focus on one element of the reform: the Assessment Framework as a core element of reform that aims to enhance student learning, transitions, achievement and employability. The authors discuss the challenges and lessons of initiating such changes in an institution where academic practices are deeply rooted in school and departmental traditions and structures and the wider institutional context that of prestige and status.

The experience of young people living in care environments making the transition to higher education is explored by **Louise Rak** and **Emily Fuller** from the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle in Australia. This particular cohort of young people are not recognised as an equity group in higher education and only a small number of targeted programs exist in Australia to specifically support and assist this cohort through their transition into university. In *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting young people with a care experience through higher education*, the authors describe their initiative, the Live, Learn, Grow (LLG) pilot and the criticality of community involvement.

*Engaging professional staff in the discourse of engagement* is the focus of a strategy from the University of the Sunshine Coast. Authors **Rhonda Leece** and **Alison Jaquet** note that a key element in the design and delivery of any type of program is the development of an "appropriate language that speaks to both academic and professional world views".

From Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, we present a peer-to-peer program providing the opportunity for students from non-English and diverse cultural backgrounds to interact with peers to extend their current communication skills. *Let's Chat - A fresh take on the invaluable role of peer-to-peer conversation in student engagement, participation and inclusion* authors **Rosalind McFarlane, Marta Spes-Skrbis** and **Anne Taib** describe the 'Let's Chat' program which provides opportunities for first year through to PhD students to voluntarily attend interactive sessions structured around themes, role play activities, games and discussion.

Finally, three Emerging Initiatives profile the evolving interest in involving students and staff in cooperative partnerships to enhance both teaching and learning and ultimately, student engagement: In *Students enabling students in a Student Partnership Project: A case study emerging from the OLT Transforming Practice Project on Student Partnerships*, **Megan Kek** and her colleagues (staff and students) from the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba, Australia, share the findings of a project that utilised Facebook engagement to nurture a students-only community to provide advice and triage queries to appropriate services. The findings demonstrate that the Closed Facebook students-only site provided a safe space, outside the formal learning/classroom environment, where student participants were able to ask and share knowledge.

Similarly, **Sarah O'Shea, Sue Bennett and Janine Delahunty** from the University of Wollongong in Australia, utilise a students as partners approach for a peer mentoring program whereby students collaborate in the design, development and enactment of a program. In *Engaging 'students as partners' in the design and development of a peer-mentoring program*, the authors stress the relational aspects of the students as partners process and efforts to consciously maintain student and staff ownership of this process.

In *Do you hear me? Student voice, academic success and retention* **Jennifer Allen** and **Catherine Nichols** detail the establishment of the Office of Student Advocacy (OSA) at their institution, the University of Newcastle, Australia. This collaborative enterprise between university staff and student associations repositions students as co-creators of student support to inform student success.

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