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## Student Success

*A journal exploring the experiences of students in tertiary education*

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## Editorial

### Perceptions of value in higher education

Welcome to our second issue for 2018. In February we opened the year with the publication of Volume 9(1), a [special issue](#) dedicated to the top papers from the 6th *Biennial National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia* (NAEEA) Conference which was hosted by Southern Cross University at the Gold Coast, Australia in December 2017. The Biennial NAEEA Conference brought together educators and practitioners to collaborate on issues of relevance to enabling pathway programs leading to undergraduate university education. Shortly after this Conference, the Australian Government announced that undergraduate funding was to be capped at 2017 levels, effectively stopping the demand driven funding system for high education in Australia. With that backdrop Volume 9(1) was a timely opportunity to consider the impact of disruption, and as perceptions of the value of higher education are challenged, to reiterate the value of supporting access and equity to higher education institutions.

*Student Success* continues to disseminate quality research and practice about enhancing student success and promotes these good practices nationally and internationally. While the Editors are conscious that *Student Success* publishes a larger number of submissions from Australian authors, we are working with educational networks and, in particular, through our international Advisory Board members, to increase awareness of the publication and encourage submissions from outside Australia.

The Journal is now indexed in [ScienceOpen](#), a relatively new social networking and research platform that not only increases visibility amongst open access publishers, but will promote content through new channels. The indexing came about via our inclusion in the Directory of

Open Access Journals ([DOAJ](#)) (with our seal for best practice) and follows recent inclusion in *CNKI*, the largest Asian academic online library, and [Paperity](#), the world's first multidisciplinary aggregator of open access journals and papers.

Importantly, the work of sharing good practice in student engagement and the relevance of research across the sector has been recognised at a national level. Both *Student Success* and the annual [STARS Conference](#) have been cited in an Australian government discussion paper on [Improving Completion, Retention and Success in Higher Education](#) (2017). Instigated by the Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham, the report cites both the STARS Conference and the Journal as examples of sharing best practice across universities and non-university higher education providers and as an important element in improving student success and retention (p.51).

### Looking forward

From this year *Student Success* will increase the number of issues published in each annual volume from two regular issues to three issues. The cycle of publication will be: an open issue in February/March; the [STARS Conference](#) issue, which publishes the best papers from the event in July/August; and an invited Special Issue in November/December. We are delighted to announce that the 2018 Special Issue will focus on the critical issue of ***Student Retention in Higher Education***. In the UK, and now in Australia, performance-based funding for higher education is back on the political agenda. In Australia retention (or attrition) rates are likely to be adopted as one of the measures in a funding model. Practitioners, researchers and scholars know that retention arises from a complex combination of student, institutional and external factors. Simple performance metrics focused on student characteristics or institutional initiatives

delivered as a ranking system, are unlikely to deliver improvements in performance, unless the complex contextual factors underlying the reasons students stay or leave are more widely considered. The 2018 special issue on retention will be a timely opportunity to contribute evidence-based research and practice to inform the development of this performance framework. In addition, we have already scheduled our 2019 Special Issue, which will be on ***Psychological Wellbeing and Distress in Higher Education*** with guest Editors Dr Abi Brooker from the University of Melbourne and Dr Lydia Woodyatt from Flinders University, Australia. This issue will report on current research and issues relating to understanding, monitoring, and improving the psychological wellbeing of students in higher education. Calls for submissions for both special issues will occur in the coming months.

## Articles

***Interactions among students' prior learning, aspiration, confidence and university entrance score as determinants of academic success*** is the focus of Gerry Rayner and Theo Papakonstantinou from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. The authors investigated whether student aspiration for a particular grade impacted academic achievement in a large cohort, first year biology unit. Their finding that student aspiration was *not* a predictor of their academic success in this unit calls for the development and inculcation of deeper learning approaches to better align students' aspirations with their final grade.

Theda Thomas from the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in Melbourne, Australia revisits David Nicol's [framework for first-year assessment practices](#) (2009), developed as part of the Scottish Enhancement Theme on the First Year Experience. In ***Implementing first-year assessment principles: An analysis of selected scholarly literature***, Theda examines how current literature addresses Nicol's first-year assessment principles, whether there were any issues in implementing them and whether anything new is emerging in the field. Based on this analysis, proposals for modifying the principles and recommendations are made to inform future research and practice.

Karen Sutherland, Cindy Davis, Uwe Terton and Irene Visser from the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) in Australia investigated social media adoption by students and the implementation of social media by educators noting that, to date, few studies have explored whether students are using it to facilitate engagement in offline environments with peers within university communities.

Studies suggest engagement in educational communities and extra-curricular activities can reduce student attrition. In ***University student social media use and its influence on offline engagement in higher educational communities*** the authors found that students in the later years of their undergraduate degree programs felt a stronger connection to their university community from following their university on social media and used social media frequently as a tool to engage offline with their university community.

In ***Library experiences of transfer students at an urban campus***, Erin Richter-Weikum and Kevin Seeber from the University of Colorado Denver in the U.S. examine the experience of 'transfer students' to gain a better understanding of their use of libraries and their comfort with locating information both before and after transferring between post-secondary institutions. Their findings may indicate the need for researchers to expand their idea of library usage to include more than just the library at a student's current or previous academic institution.

Lorinda Palmer and Rosalind Smith from University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and Tracy Levett-Jones from the University of Newcastle investigate first year nursing students' perceptions of the MASUS procedure in ***First year students' perceptions of academic literacies preparedness and embedded diagnostic assessment***. The authors indicate how stressful the process of mastering academic literacies is for many first-year students' and highlight the potential benefits of embedding for retention and engagement. Extending academic literacy instruction beyond the first year of university and exploring links to employability post-graduation are potential aspects for further research in this area.

***Front loading the curriculum: Early placement experiences enhance career awareness and motivation for students with diverse career options*** explores the student experience following the introduction of early career-based awareness-raising and reflective learning opportunities in first-year sport and exercise science-based students. From James Cook University in Townsville, Australia Catherine de Hollander, Teneale McGuckin, Kelly Sinclair, Fiona Barnett and Rebecca Sealey recommend that first year student learning in degrees with diverse career options be front loaded with career awareness and early placement opportunities to enable confirmation or transformation of degree choice and career plans.

## Practice Reports

John Hamilton from Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia examines current referencing requirements for early undergraduate assignments noting some of the obstacles that traditional curricula present for non-traditional students, and explores ways in which curricula could better accommodate them. In ***Academic reading requirements for commencing HE students – A professional reflection on whether peer-reviewed journals are the right place to start***, Hamilton questions the assumption that peer-reviewed journal articles are necessarily the optimum suggesting starting with a much more scaffolded introduction to academic research and reading. Hamilton's previous practice report in *Student Success* (Hamilton, 2016) had argued that commencing higher education (HE) students should be given much more time to acquire the academic literacies they need to complete assignments and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

From Suffolk University in the United States, Marilyn Plotkins describes how her institution introduced a new creativity requirement for first-year students as a part of curriculum reform in spite of substantial resistance. In this practice report, ***Engaging First-Year students through a shared multi-disciplinary, creativity requirement***, the author demonstrates the uniqueness of the approach and suggests anticipated outcomes in advance of a comprehensive assessment process now currently underway.

Victoria University's Trident Student Mentoring Program is discussed by Rhys Cooper in ***Connecting embedded and stand-alone peer mentoring models to enhance student engagement***. The Program has seen a significant increase in participation through the combination of stand-alone and embedded peer mentoring models and offering services that utilise the knowledge and practices of past peer mentoring theory in a new way.

***Teaching Shakespeare through blended learning*** provides a unique perspective on the delivery of curricular, in this case a traditional subject delivered to a diverse cohort using innovative teaching methods. Glen Thomas and Lesley Hawkes from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia indicate how iterations of the unit over the past couple of years had increasingly showed that the teaching staff had to change the structure of the unit and its delivery, as these no longer suited students' preferred forms of engagement. The authors discuss attempts to meet both the expectations of their students and the use of teaching technologies and highlight the cross-disciplinary nature of learning and teaching Shakespeare.

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