



Student Success

2018 Special Issue: *Student Engagement and Retention in Higher Education*

ISSN: 2205-0795
Volume 9, Issue 4
December 2018

Guest Editorial

We are delighted to present the 2018 Special Issue – *Student Engagement and Retention in Higher Education*. Practitioners, researchers and scholars know that student retention arises from a complex combination of student, institutional and external factors that manifest differently for individual students. Simple performance metrics focused on student characteristics, cohorts or institutional initiatives delivered as ranking or rating systems, are unlikely to deliver improvements in performance, unless the complex contextual factors underlying the reasons students stay or leave are more widely considered.

Increasingly, this complex mix of factors are also being influenced by the evolution of information and communication technologies. Understanding and enhancing student engagement and retention has arguably never been as critical as it is now. Increased network capabilities, machine learning and artificial intelligence are poised to fundamentally impact on the relationship between humans and machines and, by proxy between students, teachers and institutions. This 2018 special issue on engagement and retention is a timely opportunity to contribute evidence-based research and practice to inform our ongoing discussions around good practice retention initiatives that address learning, teaching and student engagement.

Student engagement is a complex multidimensional construct that we know is strongly correlated with student retention. Students who are positively engaged with their learning are more likely to experience success and to complete their qualification. But engagement is influenced by a wide range of factors and is therefore experienced differently by different cohorts and in different contexts. What is needed is research specifically focussed on subgroups of students. It is of particular value therefore to have a variety of populations represented in this special issue – including first year students in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Taiwan, and Indigenous students in Queensland Australia. It is pleasing too to have the experiences of online students represented. There is an increasing shift in many western countries towards online and blended delivery of tertiary education and we need to build on our understanding of the particular challenges that these students face.

In this Special Issue

Five submissions were selected for this special issue – three examine initiatives and observations in the first year experience, one paper details the outcomes of a national project that explored the success factors for the retention of Indigenous students and the final

selected paper examines the online experience of students undertaking an enabling program.

From Otago University in New Zealand, **Jacques van der Meer, Stephen Scott and Keryn Pratt** outline their pilot initiative to identify possible indicators of first-year students' non-engagement in the first semester and the possible impact on their first semester academic performance. While results mirror the extensive literature available already around strategies to improve first year student engagement and outcomes, the authors note the criticality of monitoring the early indicators of disengagement, specifically via the interaction with learning management systems (LMS).

Katelyn Barney from the University of Queensland, Australia explores success factors for the retention of Indigenous HDR students identified through findings from a National Teaching Fellowship. Her findings provide significant insight into our current knowledge of factors that contribute to Indigenous HDR retention and this research will undoubtedly assist universities to increase Indigenous HDR enrolments and completions across Australia.

Taiwan, like many countries, is adjusting to economic globalisation and international competition for students. **Supaporn Chalapati, Rosanna Leung and Nakarin Chalapati** present the findings of an exploration of first-year students' learning experiences in an international academic program in Taiwan. As well as discussing the internationalisation of Taiwan's higher education system, the authors discuss potential factors that affect both the expectations and experiences of students, as well as the cultural assimilation of students.

From the University of Tasmania, Australia, **Greg Rickard** and co-authors emphasise the

importance of the role of academic and professional staff who assist in navigating/guiding/supporting the student through what are, at times, complex and daunting processes in transition to university. Using a participatory action approach, this project aimed to discover what is meaningful for first-year students, by exploring how students experienced the processes of admission, enrolment, commencement, and learning and teaching in two fast-track and one online health degrees.

And finally, students' online interaction and learner participation in an online enabling science subject is explored and analysed through the lens of Anderson's (2003) interaction equivalence theorem. **Johanna Nieuwoudt** from Australia's Southern Cross University notes that students participating in online learning can still have a satisfying and meaningful learning experience despite not having student-student interaction.

**Ella Kahu
Jason Lodge**
Guest Editors

References

- Anderson, T. (2003). Getting the mix right again: An updated and theoretical rationale for interaction. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 4(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v4i2.149>

Guest Editors:

Associate Professor Jason Lodge and Dr Ella Kahu



Jason M. Lodge is Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Deputy Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. He is an experienced educator in psychology and education and a principal fellow in the Science of Learning Research Centre. Jason's areas of expertise are in psychological science, educational psychology, higher education and educational technology. His research focuses on the cognitive and emotional factors that influence student learning and the student experience in higher education.



Ella R. Kahu is a lecturer within the School of Psychology at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. She teaches first year courses on psychology and citizenship, both on campus and through distance delivery. Her broad research interests are in social psychology, often exploring how people manage their at times conflicting social roles and identities. Her current research focus is the engagement of higher education students with a particular interest in transitions and the first year experience. Her conceptual framework of student engagement is widely agreed to be a valuable tool for understanding the student experience

Please cite this Editorial as:

Kahu, E.R., & Lodge, J. (2018). Guest Editorial. *Student Success*, 9(4), i-iii. doi: 10.5204/ssj.v9i4.1141

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Student Success: A journal exploring the experiences of students in tertiary education



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