

Editorial

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2024 Student Success Conference

In 2024 the **Students Transitions Achievement Retention & Success Conference (STARS)**, **Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA)** and **National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA)** joined together to host the 2024 **Student Success Conference**.

This collaboration was intentional.

Internationally, access to and improving the student experience in tertiary education remains a focus for providers, regulators and governments. In Australia, for instance, the Australian Universities Accord Final Report (Department of Education, 2024) provides a future-focussed blueprint for decision makers and practitioners.

The Final Report and its Recommendations are anticipated to shape higher education policy and practice in the period leading to 2050, with the goal of improving the quality, accessibility, affordability and sustainability of Australia's higher education system.

STARS, EPHEA and NAEEA believed it was timely to bring together organisations whose key focus is student success, in a collegial forum to disseminate current research, good practice, progressive ideas and opportunities focused on enhancing access and outcomes.

It was within this context that we provided an opportunity for new researchers to build their capacity to conduct and publish rigorous investigation into what needs to happen to deliver the goal for 2050. Although there is already a large body of knowledge, new challenges and opportunities continue to emerge for which there is little or no research or reported good practice. The extended Research Masterclass took place on the afternoon before the regular Conference activities commenced.

On 1 July, delegates participated in the dedicated STARS Network Day which included an Equity Forum delivered in partnership with the Australian Centre for Student Equity & Success (ACSES) and equity-focused affiliated organisations. The Networks, including this year's Forum, provided an invaluable opportunity for various communities of practice across the higher education sector to come together and share their knowledge and expertise.

Over the next two days (2-3 July) three plenary panel sessions took place: A Student's Insights Panel (facilitated by Dr Kylie Austin, President EPHEA and Emeritus Professor Ron Oliver); A Future for First Nations Education and Student Success Panel (facilitated by Professor Shaun Ewen, DVC Education, Griffith University); and, Enhancing Student Access and Success through Ed Tech and Big Data (facilitated by Professor Chi Baik, The University of Melbourne). Over these two days more than 98 presentations (including the research papers and practice reports published here) and 27 posters were shared with delegates.



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In 2024 the [STARS Conference](#) celebrated its 10th anniversary and the [Student Success Journal](#) published this, its 15th volume – both significant milestones. The editorial team are especially grateful to all the authors, reviewers, Advisory Board and the new Editorial Board members, for their sustained and generous support of this open access publication.

This special **2024 Student Success Conference** issue brings together the accepted peer-reviewed articles and selected practice reports.

Articles

Harnessing and developing students' strengths may assist in their social development as they transition to university. From the Australian National University, **Naia Robinson and Sarah Walker** detail their mixed methods study to evaluate the efficacy of the use of the CliftonStrengths Assessment and targeted strengths workshops on a group of mentors and mentees within a peer mentoring program. In terms of expanding strengths-based research in Australian tertiary contexts, the authors push for further research to provide avenues for the development of evidence-based programs that ultimately benefit students' wellbeing in their transition to university.

Predicting and measuring academic success remains a focus of research in tertiary education. **Cameron Lydster** from Bond University investigates factors predicting high academic achievement at the undergraduate level revealing several factors that predict achievement after only two semesters of study.

Although not universally applicable, hyper-flexible teaching proves highly beneficial for non-traditional students with professional and personal obligations, fostering a positive learning environment conducive to deeper understanding. **Jodie Brabin and Samantha Jakimowicz** from Charles Sturt University, detail their study of the application of a hyper-flexible online teaching approach which noted that students found hyper-flexible delivery allowed greater control over their studies, enhancing their learning experience.

The online student experience forms the focus of **Jill Lawrence, Alice Brown, Petrea Redmond, Jay Cohen, Stephanie Foote and Cathy Stone**'s research which investigated strategies to facilitate students' online engagement. The authors describe five key conditions to enhance student success: fashioning a strong teacher presence; crafting an inclusive and safe online learning environment; creating well-structured and interesting content; forging explicit expectation management; and ensuring students have time to engage. This article argues that if educators are purposeful in applying these conditions in their curriculum design and teaching, students' online engagement, and their learning outcomes, will be enhanced.

Christopher Bridge, Dell Horey, Brianna Julien, Belinda Thompson and Birgit Loch examine the effect of a program of supported communities of practice among teaching academics that sought to improve the culture of learning and teaching in a large science, health and engineering faculty in an Australian university. The author's focus on one particular element of transition pedagogy affecting academic and professional units, namely the need for "cross-institutional partnerships with shared language, understanding and focus" (Kift, 2021, p. 72).

Practice Reports

Nadine Zacharias, Sadie Heckenberg, Laura Kostanski, Melissa Lowe and Jeff Waters report on the development of Swinburne's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) Evaluation Framework in which the project team adopted a student-centred design approach. The needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were positioned at the heart of the methodology and provided the starting point of explorations of student experiences in interviews and focus groups.

And finally, staying on the student equity theme, **Anna Bennett, Ryan Naylor, Jo Hanley and Cheryl Burgess** share learnings from a recent Australian project about the impacts of a wide range of access and equity programs and services, shedding light on effective strategies throughout the student life cycle.

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