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Transition Pedagogy for Student Success: A Guide to Translating Institutional Strategies into Faculty-Level Frameworks. *A Practice Report*

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Abstract

Transition pedagogy offers a solid foundation for developing whole-of-institution student success strategies due to its holistic approach. Generally, whole-of-institution student success strategies can be challenging to implement at the faculty level because they are necessarily broad. This practice report presents a step-by-step guide to translating broad university strategies into targeted, actionable, and cohesive faculty-level student success frameworks underpinned by transition pedagogy. We share a tested practice for developing and implementing faculty-level frameworks across six faculties in one Australian university. The guide includes ten steps, starting with reviewing the university's strategic goals to ensure alignment with institutional priorities, leveraging existing frameworks, and engaging key stakeholders to gather diverse perspectives and build support. We show that student success rates increased, and retention increased after the faculty-level frameworks were implemented. The guide is inclusive for diverse audiences and relevant for all those contributing to student success initiatives, regardless of their role at the institution.

***Keywords**:* Transition pedagogy; whole-of-institution framework; faculty-level framework.

Introduction

The Need for College or Departmental-Level Student Success Frameworks

Student success has long been the focus of higher education literature (see Kuh et al., 2006 for a review). Defining student success can be challenging due to its multifaceted nature, encompassing both academic and non-academic factors. For example, student success might be conceptualised as consistently engaging with a course (Kahu, 2013; Picton et al., 2018) or developing a sense of belonging with the learning community (Lizzio, 2006). What student success means can change as a function of who is asked, with diverse students holding differing perspectives (Oh & Kim, 2016). Tran et al. (2022) highlighted that the broad nature and interdependent aspects involved in student life, such as academic performance, mental health and wellbeing, finance, and employment and aspirations, play key roles in defining student success. So, whilst student success can hold various meanings, a holistic approach is required to consider student success at an institutional level.

Here, we discuss student success in one Australian higher education institution organised according to six faculties (referred to as "colleges" in this institution and hereon), each representing diverse disciplines/teaching areas and encompassing academic and professional staff. In this higher education institution, student success was defined based on over 900 student responses to the prompt, "What does success mean to you?". Student responses showed student success was defined in five key ways: (1) Academic Learning – getting a degree with a wealth of knowledge; (2) Wellbeing/Belonging/Community – being happy, healthy, and socially fulfilled; (3) Support Services – having access to foster success; (4) Career/Employment – graduating with hands-on experience and with a job; and (5) Facilities/Technology – studying in an environment that serves

needs (Support for Students, 2018). This definition of student success provided a foundation to develop the environments needed to support student success across the six colleges.

Cultivating the conditions that foster student success is a key priority, one that is shared with many higher education institutions (Kuh et al., 2006). Maximising student success is critical to ensure that every aspect of the institution, from academic support to mental health services, works cohesively to foster an environment where students can thrive. As such, higher education institutions commonly develop and implement a whole-of-institution student success strategy to communicate key student success priorities, mechanisms driving student success initiatives and useful indicators to gauge the effectiveness of these mechanisms (Thomas et al., 2017).

Transition pedagogy (Kift, 2015) is a useful approach informing a whole-of-institution student success strategy and underpins the student success frameworks discussed in this case study. Originally conceived as a strategy to assist first-year students in achieving successful transitions and outcomes, transition pedagogy is a learning and teaching philosophy that promotes student success through three key aspects: (1) A curriculum that focuses on high-quality student experiences across the student lifecycle; (2) A whole-of-institution and whole-of-student coordinated approach; and (3) Cross institution collaborations involving academic and professional staff members. These three key aspects are synergistically actioned via six curriculum principles: transition, diversity, design, engagement, assessment, and evaluation and monitoring.

Transition pedagogy has served as a theoretical and practical foundation for several whole-of-institution student success strategies over the past two decades (Kift et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2012; Smith, 2011). The principles of whole-of-institution coordinated responses and cross-institution collaborations are obvious reasons transition pedagogy is useful for informing university-wide student success strategies. However, a closer look at this teaching and learning philosophy shows that transition pedagogy encapsulates diverse perspectives underpinning higher education student success frameworks. That is, at its core, transition pedagogy synthesises Tinto's (1993) sociological perspectives, social networks and relational pedagogies (Kuh et al., 2005, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), motivation and engagement captured in psychological theories (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Dweck, 2000), and cultural perspectives (Kuh & Love, 2000). Transition pedagogy effectively draws on these diverse perspectives and organises them into clear guiding principles supporting student success.

These whole-of-institution student success strategies, however, can be challenging to interpret and implement at the college level because they are necessarily broad. Relying solely on a whole-of-institution strategy is not enough to generate and achieve sustained improvements in student success. Instead, all those contributing to student success must understand their role and how they action the university student success strategy. Kinzie and Kuh (2017) noted that implementing well-documented practices is uneven across institutions because they often create student success strategies that are a collection of disconnected programs. Instead, Kinzie and Kuh argue that what is needed is a framework that recognises and systematically maps the range of approaches to *what to do* and illustrates *how this must occur*.

Whilst establishing a whole-of-institution student success strategy underpinned by transition pedagogy, we were at risk of doing exactly what Kinzie and Kuh (2017) identified – implementing multiple college-level strategies that were disconnected and lacked efficacy to drive university-wide student success progress. As such, we aimed to establish a set of cohesive and connected student success frameworks driving action at the college level to achieve the university success strategy. In doing so, we recognised the lack of evidence or discussion in the student success literature on implementing university-level student success strategies at the college level. This work aims to help narrow that gap by providing a helpful resource (a step-by-step guide) that shows how to implement a set of cohesive, college-level student success frameworks, each underpinned by transition pedagogy.

Method

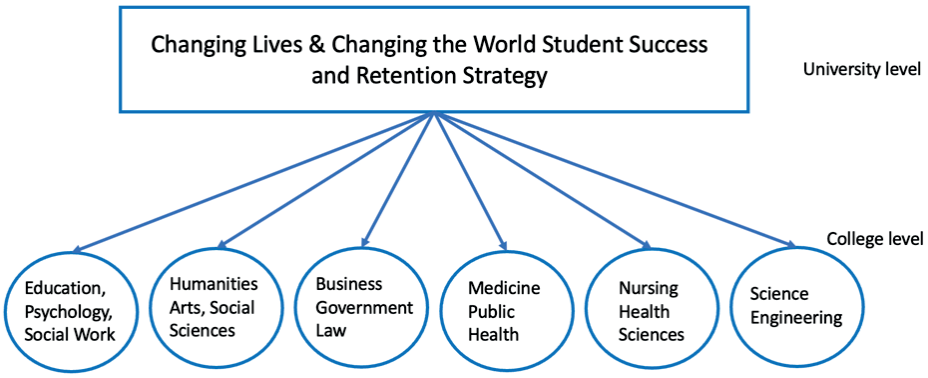
Translating a Whole-of-Institution Student Success Strategy into College-Level Student Success Frameworks: A Step-By-Step Guide

This case study focuses on an Australian higher education institution structured in six colleges encompassing various faculties (Figure 1). As such, the sample included all students from each college captured in the university-wide central data portal. Here, we discuss the process of generating college-level student success frameworks and, as such, the processes that underpin the step-by-step guide (Figure 2). This study was approved by the institutions' Human Research and Ethics Committee (Project 7438).

Importantly, we leveraged the roles established within our institution to generate the college-level student success frameworks. That is, the university-level student success strategy, *Changing Lives & Changing the World Student Success and Retention Strategy* (Success Report, 2018), informed by transition pedagogy and students' definition of student success, was implemented by a dedicated university-level Student Success Working Group.

Figure 1

University Structure



Note. The institution described is structured into six colleges. At the university level, one academic chairs the University Student Success Working Group. At the college level, one student success academic chairs the college's Student Success Working Group.

One of the recommendations to achieve the key objectives of this university-level student success strategy was to develop a coordinated, formal distributed leadership model of student success. As such, we established Student Success College Lead roles, ensuring each college had an academic leader to champion student success initiatives, largely via college-level student success working groups. The college-level student success working groups include terms of reference with membership from key stakeholders, including discipline student success leads (i.e., in the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, there are three discipline student success leads – one for each discipline) or similar other (e.g., student engagement officers), student representatives, Indigenous student success liaison, student administration services and college operational professional staff members, and in some colleges, the head of discipline and Dean of Education.

College student success leads subsequently drove the development and implementation of the college-level student success frameworks. To ensure consistency and measurable outcomes aligned with transition pedagogy and the University's student success and retention strategy, the college student success leads worked collaboratively, sharing drafts and discussing the development process regularly (i.e., quarterly and monthly on occasion). The step-by-step guide (Figure 2) captures a synthesis of each college student success lead's approach to writing and ratifying their college student success framework.

Timeline: How Long Each College-Level Framework Took to Write and Ratify

Each college took slightly different timelines to ratify its student success frameworks. Most colleges took roughly one academic year to write and implement their college student success framework. The exception is the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, which was the first to ratify its student success framework (in 2022) in a four-week period, demonstrating that the ten steps presented in the step-by-step guide can be accomplished in a very short timeframe if needed. A key mechanism driving differing implementation time periods was the time needed to seek and action feedback on frameworks (captured in steps 5 and 6 in the step-by-step guide). These iterative steps are hugely important to garner buy-in and ensure college staff feel a part of the process. However, the iterative process can be costly in terms of time.

Generating Consistency Within a Tailored Approach

As all college student success leads followed a similar approach, college student success frameworks included similar key objectives and strategies. For example, one shared key objective was to increase retention by implementing early identification and intervention strategies for at-risk students and developing coordinated outreach programs to support student retention. Various strategies used to implement this objective across colleges helped to identify what worked well and led to the development of a more formalised pilot program feeding up to the Support for Students Policy for university-wide implementation. Another example comes from the shared objective of promoting student engagement and a sense of belonging

by fostering a sense of community through mentoring programs, student representatives, social events, and feedback mechanisms. All frameworks also shared a key objective of developing academic and professional skills by embedding academic and learning support services in all courses and providing opportunities in courses to develop employability skills and engage with industry. Importantly, these shared key objectives are communicated here in broad terms, but the actual frameworks' key objectives are specific in their wording to afford clear measurement and reporting over time; for example, reducing attrition to 10% for continuing students by 2025 is a specific objective for retention.

Differences between college frameworks lie primarily in the specific college priorities and strategies ensuring alignment to the needs of differing student cohorts. For example, one college framework includes the development of Standards of Practice to enhance teaching and reporting practices that support student success proactively. Another college has embedded staff training and showcased best practices in various forums to achieve similar goals. Approaches also vary in student mentoring, with some Colleges integrating peer mentoring within the curriculum while others offer opt-in academic mentoring sessions. College student success structures also differ, necessitating differences within frameworks. One college has dedicated Student Experience Coordinator roles who are touch-points for students experiencing difficulties, whereas another college has Student Success Discipline Leads who drive student success initiatives and upskill staff within their programs.

Figure 2

Step-By-Step Guide to Creating College-Level Student Success Frameworks

Step 1: Review university strategies	**Objective:** Ensure the college framework aligns with the university overall success and retention strategy and any other university strategies. **Actions:** Review relevant university strategy documents and initiatives. Identify key goals and priorities that the college frameworks should support.
Step 2: Leverage existing frameworks	**Objective:** Leverage established frameworks to guide the development process. **Actions:** Research and review existing frameworks such as the Advance HE Student Success Framework. Identify elements from these frameworks that can be adapted to your college context.
Step 3: Engage stakeholders	**Objective:** Involve key stakeholders to gather input and build buy-in. **Actions:** Hold discussions with college student success leads, Deans of Education, and other relevant stakeholders. Form a student success working group with key stakeholders. Seek feedback from student representatives and professional staff.
Step 4: Identify strengths and areas for improvement	**Objective:** Assess the college's current practices, identify gaps and areas needing enhancement. **Actions:** Conduct a SWOT analysis of current student success initiatives in the college. Gather data on student performance, retention, and satisfaction to identify trends and gaps.
Step 5: Develop the framework	**Objective:** Create a draft framework that outlines key objectives, actions and indicators. **Actions:** Use insights from existing frameworks and stakeholder input to draft the framework. Ensure the framework includes clear objectives, action points, and metrics for evaluation. Consider how to incorporate existing structures and groups, such as student representatives and associations.
Step 6: Seek feedback and refine	**Objective:** Iterate the framework based on feedback from stakeholders.

	Actions: Present the draft framework to relevant stakeholders for feedback. Refine the framework based on the feedback received. Repeat the feedback and refinement process as needed to ensure broad support and alignment.
Step 7: Secure endorsement	**Objective:** Obtain formal approval and endorsement from the college leadership. **Actions:** Present the refined framework to the governing education committee and other relevant bodies. Incorporate any final feedback and secure endorsement from the executive leadership team.
Step 8: Implement the framework	**Objective:** Put the framework into action and begin executing the outlined actions. **Actions:** Communicate the framework and its objectives to all relevant parties. Assign responsibilities for action points to specific individuals or teams. Use multiple communication channels to ensure everyone is informed and engaged.
Step 9: Monitor and evaluate	**Objective:** Continuously assess the effectiveness of the framework and make adjustments as needed. **Actions:** Establish evaluation points and use metrics to measure key indicators. Collect and analyse data to track progress. Use feedback and data to make iterative improvements to framework.
Step 10: Maintain a living document	**Objective:** Ensure the framework remains relevant and adaptable to changing needs. **Actions:** Regularly review and update the framework to reflect new insights, data and institutional changes. Engage stakeholders in ongoing discussions to keep the framework aligned with evolving goals.

Note. Colleges used these ten steps to create student success frameworks.

Results

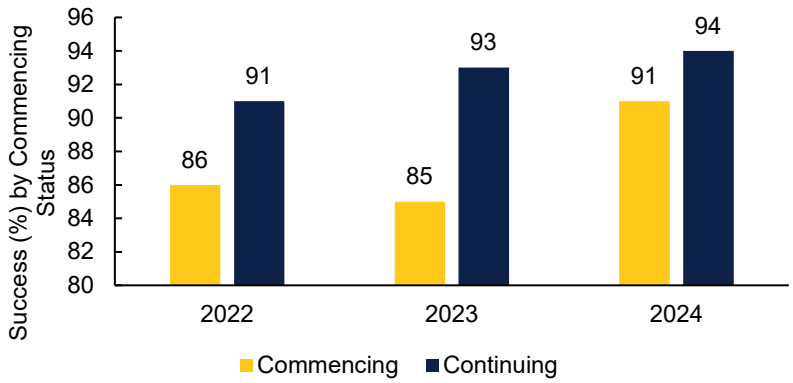
So What? Impact of Enacting College-Level Student Success Frameworks

Student Success

Across the University, student success increased from 2022 to 2024 (Figure 3), following the implementation of the college-level student success frameworks. In this context, student success is defined as the percentage of students who passed their studies. Data include all commencing students enrolled in all degree levels and domestic and international students across the years 2022 to 2024 at the University.

Figure 3

Change in Student Success for Commencing and Continuing Students



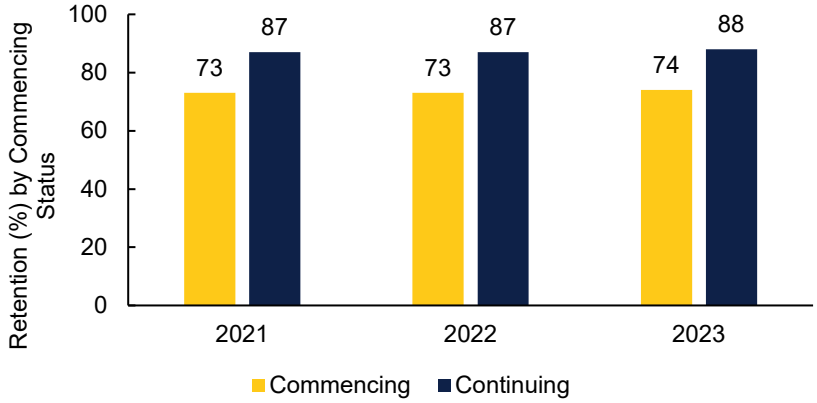
Note. Student success increased following the introduction of the college-level student success frameworks.

Retention

Retention is defined here as students who were enrolled in a given year, who returned the following year, enrolled in the same or a different degree program, or completed their studies. There was a very slight upward trend in retention for continuing students (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Change in Retention for Commencing and Continuing Students



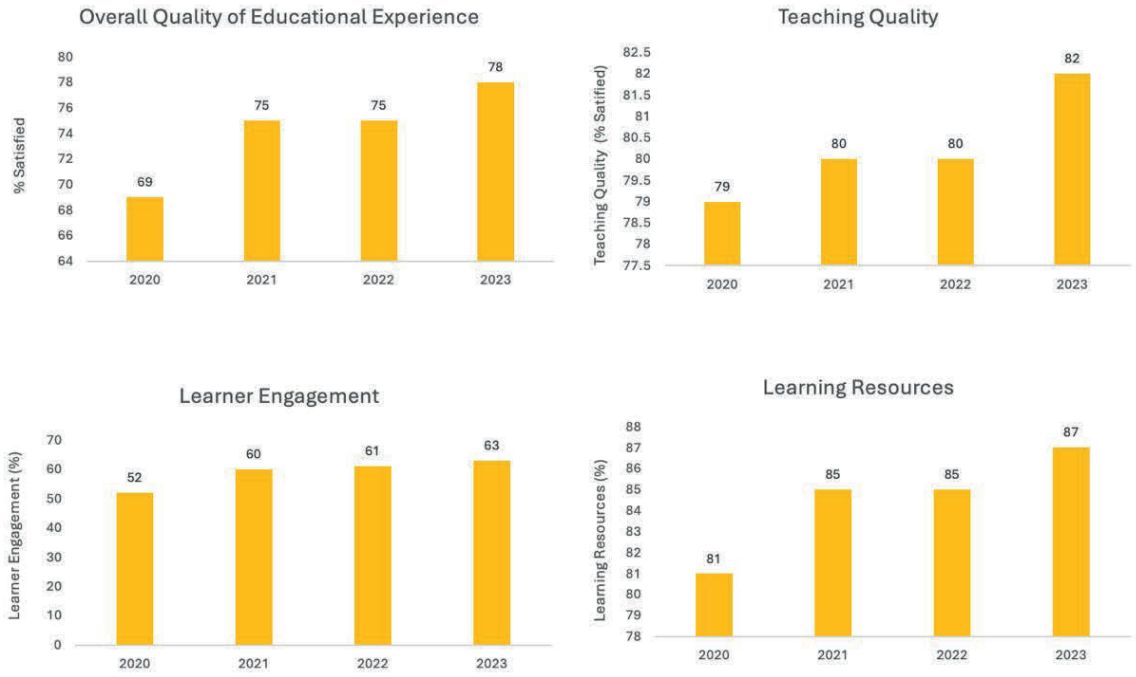
Note. Students' retention increased following the introduction of the college-level student success frameworks.

Student Experience Survey and Graduate Outcomes

Student Experience Survey data (qilt.edu.au) demonstrated increased student satisfaction with the overall quality of the educational experience, teaching quality, learner engagement, learning resources and skill development after the college-level frameworks were implemented (Figure 5). Further, the graduate full-time employment rate also increased between 2022 (76%) and 2024 (80%).

Figure 5

Change in Student Experiences



Note. Overall quality of the educational experience, teaching quality, learner engagement and learning resources improved following the introduction of the college-level student success frameworks.

Discussion

Transition pedagogy (Kift et al., 2010) is a useful approach underpinning whole-of-institution student success strategies (Nelson et al., 2012). However, whole-of-institution student success strategies are necessarily broad, making them challenging to implement at a college level. We aimed to bridge the gap between university and college-level student success strategies by developing a step-by-step guide on translating whole-of-institution student success strategies to college-level student success frameworks, informed by transition pedagogy. The step-by-step guide captures a top-down and bottom-up approach that significantly facilitated the implementation of the college-level student success frameworks. As Egea et al. (2014) mentioned, the top-down and bottom-up approach ensures a consistent strategy is enacted whilst driving buy-in from academics and professional staff. In the present context, the top-down was the university-level student success strategy. The bottom-up was the student success college leads championing the college frameworks and the work associated with them.

Since implementing the college-level student success frameworks, student success, retention, all parameters on the Student Experience Survey (QILT, 2023), and graduate outcomes have improved. The student-defined measures of success outlined in the introduction provide a reference point for interpreting these improvements. That is, it is assumed that these positive outcomes align with the key factors identified by students and targeted by the college student success frameworks—namely, academic achievement, a strengthened sense of belonging, enhanced support, the development of career readiness skills, and access to facilities and technologies that foster learning.

Commonly Experienced Challenges

Given the extensive and interconnected aspects of student success, a challenge in developing the college student success frameworks was the necessity to synthesise multiple policy documents and strategies. It was essential to refer to existing documents and strategies while also acknowledging and integrating effective processes to structure and establish key college objectives, as well as to recognise how all processes and procedures work together to achieve these objectives. Furthermore, operating within the university structure, which encompasses numerous areas and portfolios, required consultation with a variety of stakeholders. Particularly in a dynamic environment where changes to policies, portfolios, and staffing occurred

during the development of the frameworks, careful consideration was needed to ensure that the student success frameworks accurately reflected the current environment while also being adaptable for the future. Despite this challenge, it ultimately ensured that the student success frameworks were more robust and integrated various crucial aspects related to transition pedagogy and student success, such as cross-institution collaboration.

Once the frameworks were developed, establishing buy-in from academic staff members was the most significant challenge. Without buy-in, these college-level student success frameworks are nothing more than busy work with little power to impact measurable progress in student success. Generating buy-in was largely achieved via senior executive leadership. A senior executive leadership team (for example, Dean of Education endorsement) impacted the college staff's expectation to action the college-level student success framework. However, securing senior executive leadership endorsement and formal ratification was also a common challenge experienced. Across our Colleges, some College Student Success Leads needed to present their student success frameworks to multiple stakeholders before securing sufficient buy-in to access senior executive leadership. Reservations centred primarily around concerns that implementation strategies within the frameworks might represent increased workload for college staff. An important consideration in developing the frameworks was ensuring that processes were easy, normative and efficient.

Conclusion

Developing tailored, college-specific student success frameworks was essential in bridging the gap between university-wide strategy and meaningful, college-level implementation. By aligning the University's overarching goals with the unique contexts, priorities, and challenges of each College, these frameworks foster greater engagement and ownership among academics and professional staff. This localised approach enhances staff buy-in and ensures that the broader university strategy is embedded in everyday practice, driving more effective and sustained impact.

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