

Juggling First-Year Student Experience and Institutional Change: An Australian Experience¹

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The face of first year experience has changed dramatically over the past decade and there is no reason to expect that this will not be the case in the decade to come. The one constant, however, is that the first year of university study remains arguably the most critical time for engaging students with their learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills to not only persist but to be successful and independent in their learning throughout the undergraduate years and beyond

Krause, 2005, 9.

Successful transition to the tertiary context within the first year increases students' overall satisfaction with their undergraduate experience as well as increasing the likelihood of degree completion (Krause, 2005; Tinto, 2002; Vest, 2005; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Yorke, & Thomas, 2003). Large classes or programs that do not have a core curriculum to create shared purpose and identity, in combination with the financial and personal demands on students which have the potential to fragment their experiences of campus life, may contribute to making this transition difficult (Beder, 1997; Hayden & Long, 2006; Krause, 2005; McInnis & Hartley, 2001). This paper will identify current issues for Australian first year students and describe how two urban Australian Universities, one research intensive and one student centred, have engaged and are currently engaging in, respectively, a quality change process through the development and implementation of learning and teaching strategic plans. Reflections on the author's experiences at the research intensive university will be presented. In an effort to connect the author's work in the area of first year student experience and identify areas needing attention for further consolidation in the future, a model of first year student experience will be presented. This model has been designed to identify key phases leading up to, and including, the first semester of study. It highlights and identifies pertinent areas which require high levels of communication and consistency of information between the University, feeder schools, and potential university students. The model relies on the development of a continuum of cohesive experiences which inform a student's potential success or failure in tertiary settings.

¹ This abstract was written and submitted whilst the author was located at The University of Queensland, subsequent changes have been made to the original submission based on new employment at Griffith University. This paper is adapted from Burnett (2006). *The first year experience project report*. Brisbane, Australia: The University of Queensland.

1. Experiences at a Large Research Intensive University

The author's first official entry into First Year Student Experience began at a large urban research intensive university when she was employed as the First Year Experience (FYE) Project Coordinator. This University is the oldest university in Queensland with three main campuses about two hours driving distance apart and approximately 50, 000 enrolled students. The project was a strategic teaching and learning initiative jointly funded through The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) [DVC(A)] and the seven Faculties.

A large component of research led discussion and innovation within the area of First Year Experience focuses on attrition rates and the retention of first year students. Many leading researchers (for instance, Krause, 2006; 2005; Yorke, & Thomas, 2003) have heeded timely warnings about designing programs which are re-active to attrition rates, rather than pro-active. This is largely due to the multi dimensional nature of attrition; that is, students leave current programs of study for a number of reasons (for example, financial, health, and family and work related matters). In addition, there is currently no efficient way of tracking students who move between institutions within Australia or return to study after a one or two year absence. Thus, making it difficult to get a clear understanding of why students discontinue their study. Challenging traditionally held views about first year students and their experiences whilst fostering innovative teaching practices is central in any endeavour which seeks to move forward.

The overarching aim of the project at this large research intensive university was to implement practical, specific, student-centred initiatives to create a learning environment which would improve first year students' experiences. The project used an action research methodology to plan, articulate, implement and reflect on initiatives. The methodology will be presented in the following sub-section. This will be followed by vignettes of the seven Faculty-based and a variety of support unit initiatives to illustrate how first year students' issues were addressed to improve the overall student experience and bring about institution wide change.

1.2. Methodology and Project Structure

The overarching view of the FYE project was informed by a reflective research framework (Adler, & Haas, 1992; Barnett, Walsh, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1995; Dewey, 1916; Fullan, 1990; Swain, 1998) or action research model (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Lynd-Balta, Erklenz-Watts, Freeman, & Westbay, 2006; Simpson, & Schockley-Zalabak, 2005; Tomal, 2005). This framework is a process whereby an action or activity is planned, articulated,

implemented and then reflected upon in a cyclical style. Each reflection influences and modifies action or activity in the subsequent cycle.

The first cycle of the research project occurred at the end of 2005 with the planning of the 2006 Faculty-based Induction Programs. Prior to the first cycle, preliminary work occurred in 2005. This preliminary work was essentially two-fold:

1. the implementation and evaluation of Faculty-based pilot projects; and
2. the development of Faculty-based Induction programs for 2006.

Seed funding was provided through the *Enhanced Student Contribution Funds* to assist in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a number of pilot projects run at a local Faculty level. These pilot projects were aimed at developing academic writing & research intervention skills; developing different learning skills & approaches, administering early diagnostic assessment exercises, conducting early one-on-one interviews to identify students at risk; developing an elective research-based course for credit; establishing physical & virtual drop-in centres with lead tutors; and introducing additional Week 1 tutorials for socialisation & explication of course objectives. In many cases these pilot projects informed the Faculty planning for the 2006 programs which were aimed at inducting first year students into their university learning experience.

A large proportion of the first cycle of activities were Faculty driven in the form of Induction programs which expand information and welcome sessions conducted in Orientation week, as recommended in research conducted by Goodsell, Maher and Tinto (1992), Krause (2005), Krause, Hartley, James, and McInnis (2005), Kuh and Vesper, (1997), Lowe and Cook (2003), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Pitkethly and Prosser (2001), Smith and Hughes (2004), Vest (2005), and Yorke and Thomas (2003). Research to date indicates that a sustained, academic Induction program which builds on activities conducted in the Orientation Week program presents opportunities to engage, motivate and challenge students, to assist them to develop clear aspirational goals, to immerse them in scholarly discourse and to help them come to terms with academic life (Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Krause, 2005; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; Kuh, & Vesper, 1997; Lowe, & Cook, 2003; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Pitkethly, & Prosser, 2001; Vest, 2005; Yorke, & Thomas, 2003). These Faculty-based Induction programs were implemented in semester one and detailed summaries are provided in Section 1.3, *Faculties and their Projects*.

In general terms, each of the Faculty-based Induction programs were locally developed and driven, hence they were unique and looked different to each other. It is important to note here that a number of the seven Faculties are based at more than one of the three main

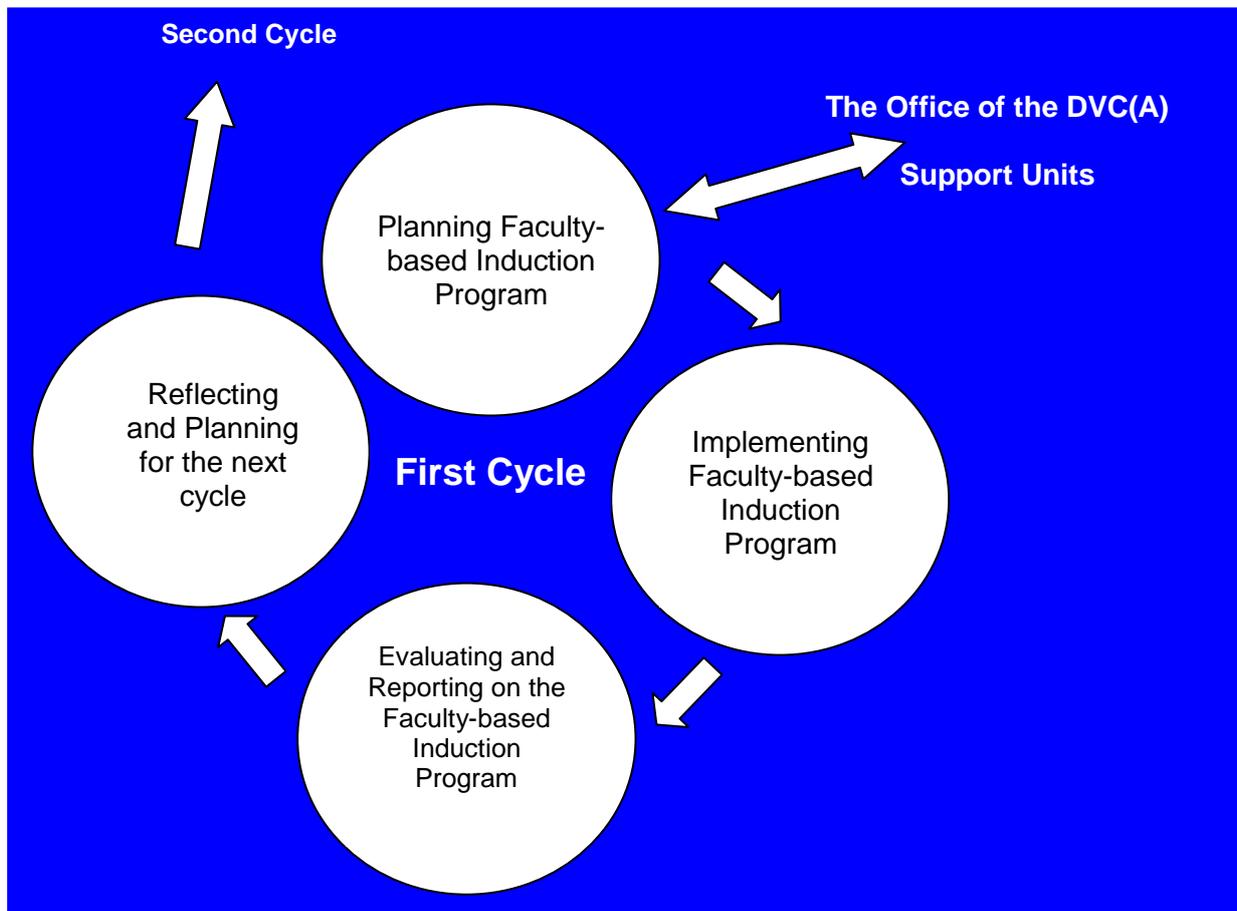
campuses. Each of these three campuses were very different in size and design. They each had a distinctive clientele which informed and shaped the style and mode of program delivery. Nonetheless, there were four (4) common elements which ran across each of the Faculty-based Induction programs:

1. Building a sense of community and connection within the university context;
2. Making connections with a range of possible employment opportunities;
3. Addressing academic skill needs and improving communication between staff and students; and
4. Hosting social activities to enable students to meet one another and form friendship/support networks.

The diagram below, Diagram 1.2.1, *Project Research Cycle*, illustrates the first cycle of the project.

Diagram 1.2.1

Project Research Cycle



The Office of the DVC(A) and Support units such as the Library, Student Centre, Student Support Services, and the Student Union played integral roles in the planning and implementation of the Faculty-based programs. These programs, whilst locally driven from the Faculty level, had always been intended to draw on, and integrate, expertise from across the university site. For example, The Office of the DVC(A) was the key champion of the project through project funding, lobbying at the highest levels, and providing in-person encouragement and support for everyone involved at project related workshops and activities. The Library, Student Centre, Student Support Services and the Student Union were all involved in running information sessions and providing ongoing support for each of the Faculties. Each of these support units were vital in moving the project forward particularly as they viewed their organisations as being complementary to the Faculty driven activities to improve the experiences of first year students. The support units embraced the opportunity to address issues faced by students in their first year of tertiary study in a holistic and collaborative approach with the Faculties.

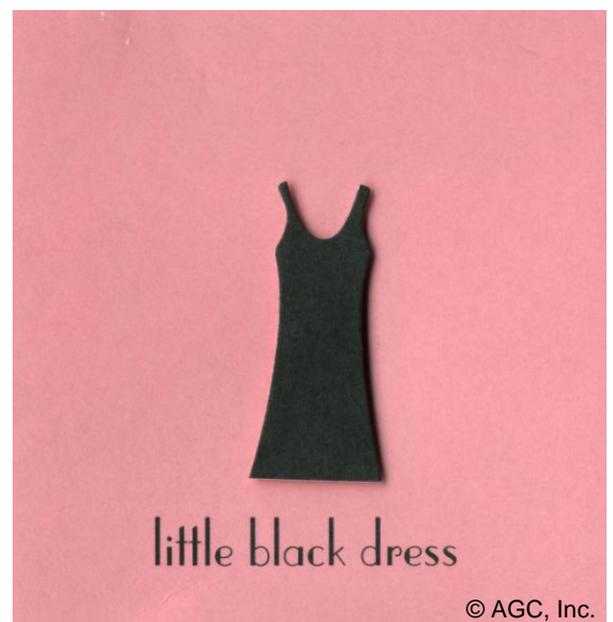
1.3. Faculties and their Projects

While the aim of the FYE project was not to focus solely on, and thus react to, attrition rates it is appropriate to mention relevant attrition rates throughout this next section. The university, as a whole, experienced attrition rates of 17.2% in the commencement year for Bachelor degrees in 2005 compared to 16.8% in 2001. Interestingly, the attrition rates between Faculties varied significantly and appear to have been influenced by the actual number of commencing students and the nature of the programs offered, that is, whether commencing students were able to define themselves as a recognisable cohesive cohort with clearly defined employment opportunities, or careers, at the beginning of their study.

The following sub-sections summarise the Faculty-based Induction programs implemented and evaluated in the first cycle and identify current innovative practice in each of the Faculties and Schools as it relates to the FYE Project.

1.3.1. ARTS Faculty

The attrition rate in the commencement year for an ARTS Bachelor's (BA) degree in 2005 was 26.3% compared with 25.8% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students decreased between 2001 and



2005 by 308 students. Despite the drop in enrolments, this Faculty still attracts over 1,600 commencing students every year.

The focus of the Faculty-based Induction program for ARTS was influenced by a recent Bachelor of Arts degree review and warning signs about the overall effectiveness of this particular degree (for instance, high attrition rates, declining OP cut-offs [from 8 to 12 in four years], significant loss of first preferences [down by 350 over four years], and bottom-heavy recruitment from the OP range [approximately 50% of commencing students are currently drawn from the lower two quartiles]). The overarching aim of the Induction program was to actively address misunderstandings by students, and by those who advise them (for example, parents and careers advisors) about immediate and long term career outcomes for BA degree graduates. The hypothesis was that student motivation could be enhanced early on by providing students with clear graduate outcomes upon completion of a BA degree. An analogy of the ARTS degree as being the little black dress of undergraduate degrees was used to highlight the versatility and flexibility of employment outcomes for graduates with a BA degree. The four key objectives of the program included,

- ◆ To improve student retention in the BA;
- ◆ To enhance students' motivation in their BA studies;
- ◆ To inform students about career and life outcomes for BA graduates; and
- ◆ To provide students with a better first year experience.

The program consisted of a suite of activities and significant development of strategies for 2007 and beyond. For instance, informative lectures were conducted at St Lucia and Ipswich campuses during the first two weeks of semester (attended by over 750 commencing students), a revision of the BA Prospectus to emphasise career and life outcomes for BA graduates was implemented, a drive for change in large first year subjects through the use of the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) system was achieved, significant development of gateway courses for all majors offered in the BA for students commencing in 2007 was undertaken, the development of a BA Communities web site with special emphasis for first year students commencing in 2007 occurred, the development of a core skills course for BA students commencing in 2008 was addressed, the development of a proper major-based student support (through the Carrick Institute *Closing The Gap* project) and the move to appoint a Faculty-based First Year Student Advisor in 2007 was also undertaken.

The evaluation of this program was on-going over an extended period of time. Measurement of the overall success of the Induction program was gathered through,

- ◆ Student survey at the end of 2006;
- ◆ Decreased attrition rates in the first year of the BA;
- ◆ Increased OP cut offs for the BA;
- ◆ Increased percentage of commencing cohort from the top two quartiles of the OP range;
- ◆ Higher levels of student satisfaction about the gateway courses, particularly in relation to assessment and access to staff; and
- ◆ Higher levels of uptake of relevant programs offered by Student Support Services, particularly in relation to careers planning.

Overall the Induction program was seen as a long term strategy to be embedded within the everyday practices of the Faculty.

Table 1.3.1
Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of ARTS

	School of English, Media Studies, & Art History	School of History, Philosophy, Religion, & Classics	School of Languages & Comparative Cultural Studies	School of Music
Faculty Wide Initiative		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Instructional web site ◆ Appointment Student 	Designer for BA Communities (Carrick Grant for 2007) Of Faculty based First Year Advisor in 2007	
St Lucia Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Development and implementation of PASS Program. ◆ PASS Coordinator 			
Ipswich Campus		N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Development of website (First Year @ UQ Ipswich, www.uq.edu.au/ipswich/firstyear) – Dr Juliana de Nooy 	

1.3.2. Biological and Chemical Sciences (BACS) Faculty



The attrition rate in the commencement year for a Bachelor's degree in the BACS Faculty in 2005 was 14.8% compared to 11.8% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students has decreased by 74 students; however, this Faculty

still has over 1,100 commencing students enrolling every year.

In 2005/2006 the BACS and EPSA (Engineering, Physical Sciences and Architecture) Faculties took a unique approach in developing a joint Faculty-based Induction program. These Faculties shared over 1,000 first year Bachelor of Science (BSc) students in 2006. As a result, they decided to combine their efforts and resources to enhance their existing orientation program and develop further activities for this particular cohort of students. It is important to mention here that not all of the Schools in the two Faculties were connected with first year BSc students, and as a result, these Schools developed their own Orientation and Induction activities as part of individual Faculty responsibilities. For example, separate activities were undertaken by The School of Engineering. Special mention of these separate activities will be elaborated independently of the joint efforts between the two Faculties for their BSc students.

The BSc degree is designed to be a versatile degree which seeks to accommodate a wide variety of student interests and career aspirations. The courses on offer within the degree range from well established to newly emerging and encompass general as well as specialist areas of science. There is a broad scientific based approach for the first year of the degree with the option to specialise in two specific science fields or continue with a broad approach for the later years of the degree. Non-science options and dual degree combinations are also possible. Like the ARTS Faculty, both BACS and EPSA recognised a problem of providing their first year students with a sense of community and cohesion because the BSc degree does not have a clearly defined cohort identity or structured career outcome.

Extensive plans were developed in 2005 by a cross Faculty working party (lead by former BACS Director of Studies, Professor Susan Hamilton and Acting Chair of the EPSA Teaching & Learning Committee, Dr Massimo Gasparon) which involved a united approach in the development and delivery of a suite of Orientation and Induction activities. These activities included extending existing activities to target a better academic and social transition for BSc first year students. For example,

- BUDDY program – a student to student mentoring program for all BSc students in weeks two (2) through five (5) where new students were paired with experienced students. This program was previously only available to students in the BACS Faculty.
- A combined welcome, campus tour and barbecue lunch in Orientation week. New students were divided into groups of twenty (20) and taken on science orientated campus tours by later year students (often PASS leaders). First year coordinators, lecturers of first year courses and tutors took an active role in the welcome and preparation of the barbecue lunch (in conjunction with The Society of Undergraduate Science Students – SUSS) so new students were introduced to a community of UQ scientists and science teachers in an informal setting.

- PASS program (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) offered for the entire academic year in key courses to introduce new learners to a supportive, community, discipline, based approach to thinking and learning about science.
- Weekend field trip to Moreton Bay Research Station for small specialist cohorts of students. For example, students in the *Advanced Research Studies* science program, *Environment and Science* specialist program, and the *Marine Science* specialist program (*Bright Minds* program).
- A mid week lecture free day in week four (4) to allow for a full day reflection and consolidation event occurred in the second cycle of the project in 2007. Groups of 40 students assigned to two or three academics plus a tutor engaged in a series of activities which included discussions on career options and degree structure and modelled how to approach a scientific problem from a range of discipline specific frameworks.

Resourcing implications (for example, personnel, finance, and timetabling), staffing changes, and the logistics of communicating with a large number of teaching and support staff across two Faculties hindered the full implementation of the original suite of activities in 2006. Smaller incremental projects were recommended for the subsequent cycles of joint Faculty-based Induction programs despite a well recognised need within both Faculties of a need to actively address issues for first year BSc students. A small return rate of survey forms from students during the combined welcome, campus tour and barbecue lunch in Orientation week also hindered the Faculties ability to evaluate the success of the event and identify the specific early needs of the cohort. The need for changes in the collection of student feedback at Orientation and Induction activities was noted.



Table 1.3.2

Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Biological and Chemical Sciences (BACS)

	School of Biomedical Sciences	School of Integrative Biology	School of Molecular & Microbial Sciences
St Lucia Campus	PASS <i>Bright Minds</i>	Programs in key Advanced Study	courses Program
			♦ PASS Coordinator (also runs training programs within and outside the university for PASS).

1.3.3. Business, Economics and Law (BEL) Faculty

The attrition rate in the commencement year for a Bachelor's degree in the BEL Faculty (across both St Lucia and Ipswich campuses) in 2005 was 13.2% compared to 14% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students decreased by 333 students between 2001 and 2005, however, this Faculty still has over 1,500 commencing students enrolling every year.



The focus of the BEL Faculty-based Induction program in the first cycle was aimed at first year students at both the St Lucia and Ipswich campuses to assist in their transition from high school to university and address current attrition rates. Whilst student cohorts differ between the two campuses and each had specific needs and issues (for example, different entry requirements/OP scores), the majority of first year students enrolling in undergraduate programs within the Faculty were school leavers. A non-course specific Induction program was developed and run in the first cycle because there was no one single course which all first year students had to undertake. Evaluation of the 2005 pilot study which developed and ran an additional tutorial in four of the foundation courses over a one week period highlighted an uneven dissemination of information and heavy reliance on individual staff members. The evaluation also showed a relatively high turn over rate of staff between semesters. Results from the 2005 pilot study influenced the structure of the 2006 Induction (first cycle) program.

The aim of the 2006 Induction program was to ensure all first year students were exposed to relevant transition information at timely junctures throughout their first semester as a means of enabling them to be proactive rather than reactive to challenges during their undergraduate studies and reduce the initial first semester load on student advisors. The program was campus specific and disseminated in styles which were appropriate to the different student cohorts (for example, *Mentoring in Class* program ran in the Business School and School of Economics at Ipswich campus while a Faculty level program was developed and implemented at St Lucia). Socialisation activities were also incorporated at each of the campuses to foster student and staff networking opportunities, both within and across all program types. Stronger links between the Faculty and the Library and Student Support Services were actively developed and encouraged as part of the program.

The Faculty level program at St Lucia involved a series of four two hour workshops spaced throughout the semester (see Table 1.3.3.1., *St Lucia Faculty Level Induction Workshops*) and drew on a range of presenters.

Table 1.3.3.1
St Lucia Faculty Level Induction Workshops

When	What
O Week	What to expect and basic time management
Week 2	What you should know by now
Week 5	Assessment is coming
Week 10	Disaster recovery, feedback, preparing for final exams

Written feedback from students at the end of each workshop and anecdotal evidence from academic and administrative staff was gathered as a means of evaluation. Students who attended workshops found them extremely valuable. All feedback informed changes to the program for second semester, 2006, for mid year entry students. For instance, the workshops in semester two were promoted as lunch time sessions where students brought their own lunch and the Faculty provided beverages. Posters were also prominently displayed at the beginning of the second semester. Academics from each of the four schools were consulted about their individual *Tips to Success* and *Common Mistakes* for first year students during second semester. Information about these approaches were combined and subsequently integrated into the four workshops.

Table 1.3.3.2.
Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law (BEL)

	UQ Business School	School of Economics	School of Tourism & Leisure Management
St Lucia Campus		Faculty-based, Induction program	campus specific run in 2006
Ipswich Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Mentoring Across Campus Scheme</i> for all programs at Ipswich is being run and developed from this school at Ipswich – Dr Marie Kavanagh (Equity Grant, 2005/2006; Carrick Citation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Mentoring in Class</i> program implemented (voluntary, later year students as mentors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of a School based First Year Experience Coordinator. ◆ First year welcome function which included an Industry Speaker. ◆ Blackboard site with discussion board. ◆ <u>First Semester - HOSP1005 Tourism, Leisure, Hospitality: Principles</u> Compulsory foundation course recommended in first semester. This course includes tutorials on essay writing, referencing, preparing a presentation, Endnote, sourcing information and involves staff from the Library and Student Support Services. The assessment for this course presents students with one essay question

	<p>for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning, 2006).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Expanding Horizons Program</i> – Dr Marie Kavanagh with support from Education Queensland ◆ <i>Mentoring in Class</i> program implemented 		<p>where they receive 10% of their final grade for a draft, detailed feedback, and 30% of their final grade for a final version of the essay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <u>Second Semester</u> – Six workshops presented at timely intervals throughout the semester with a focus on School specific assessment requirements and expectations (differentiated from the Faculty-based Induction Workshops presented at St Lucia campus). ◆ First year courses have tutorial numbers limited to 20.
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1.3.4. Engineering, Physical Sciences and Architecture (EPSA) Faculty

The attrition rate in the commencement year for a Bachelor's degree in the EPSA Faculty in 2005 was 11.9% compared to 11% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students decreased by 113 students between 2001 and 2005, however, this Faculty still has over 1,000 commencing students enrolling every year.

As stated previously, EPSA worked in conjunction with BACS to develop and implement a collaborative Induction program for their shared BSc student cohort. EPSA comprises of four (4) schools and as a result offers a number of programs in addition to the BSc undergraduate degree. For instance, The



School of Engineering (over 800 first year students enrolled in 2006 and over 900 enrolled in 2007) and the School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering had the largest first year student cohorts and well established Orientation and dedicated Induction type courses (for example, *ENGG1000, Introduction to Professional Engineering*). Smaller programs such as Architecture, Environmental Management (Sustainable Development), Information Technology, and Regional and Town Planning also had well established Induction programs which included an orientation meeting with key staff and students (including later year students) from specific disciplines and industry. Each of these programs had well defined student cohorts and established transition and Induction activities.

Large amounts of information on the thoughts, issues and experiences of first year students were captured by ongoing evaluation in 2006, particularly in the School of Engineering.

Table 1.3.4
Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Engineering, Physical Sciences and Architecture (EPSA)

	School of Engineering	School of Geography, Planning, & Architecture	School of Information Technology & Electrical Engineering	School of Physical Sciences
St Lucia Campus	First Year Engineering and	Engineering Students School of Information	are shared between Technology & Electrical	School of Engineering
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Engineering Coordinator (shared with School of ITEE) ◆ <i>ENGG1000, Introduction to Professional Engineering</i> (Blackboard site) (shared with School of ITEE) ◆ Development of a first year centre/space (Expected to be open 2007) (shared with School of ITEE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Coordinator (2005) ◆ Ongoing well established Orientation program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ongoing well established Orientation program ◆ Appointment of First Year Engineering Coordinator (shared with School of Eng) ◆ <i>ENGG1000, Introduction to Professional Engineering</i> (Blackboard site) (shared with School of Eng) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ First Year Teaching Director ◆ Trialling PASS MATH for the time in ◆ Carrick Citation Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning 2007 – Barbara Maenh ◆ EPSA Faculty Citation Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning 2007 – Margarete Wegener

1.3.5. HEALTH SCIENCES Faculty

The attrition rate in a Bachelor's degree in the HEALTH SCIENCES Faculty in 2005 was 9.2% compared to 11.1% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students increased between 2001 and 2005 by 151 students. The most significant increase in student numbers occurred between 2004 and 2005 (an increase of 174 students). 2006 saw the introduction of a new Faculty-administered program, The Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHlthSc), at the Ipswich campus. This new program was the focus of the first cycle of Faculty-based Induction programs.



The students enrolling in the new BHlthSc program had a lower OP score than what is usually required for other Health Sciences programs. The program

offered a number of graduate destinations options but no specific registrable profession, hence, potentially placing this cohort at a higher risk of dissatisfaction and possible attrition. With a small student cohort (eighteen students enrolled in 2006) and an awareness of increased risk of higher than normal student issues, the Faculty designed an Induction program which would assist them in developing guidelines for other schools as well as meeting the specific needs of the vulnerable cohort in question. The overarching aim of the Induction program was to investigate the relationship between first year student needs, Induction strategies and academic and retention outcomes. The Induction program also formed the basis of a research project and received ethical clearance from the Behavioural and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

Essentially the Induction program was broken into three phases (Phase I, II and III). Phase I involved the completion of a confidential questionnaire at the beginning of semester one. Phase II involved the actual implementation of the Induction program (*CLICS* – Connect, Learn, Identify, Communicate and Support) and included the development of peer support and study groups; physical and virtual drop-in sessions; one-on-one mid-semester interviews; assistance in the development of a BHLthSc student society; and monthly morning tea presentations by key community stake holders in relation to career options and pathways. The final phase, Phase III, involved the implementation of a confidential follow-up questionnaire and the evaluation of two questionnaires (initial and follow-up).

The program was designed to have minimal resource implications, other than those already built into the BHLthSc annual budget, to ensure its continued implementation. Strong links were made with Student Support Services, the Library, and employer representation groups in the local community as a result of the Induction program.

Table 1.3.5

Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Health Sciences (HEALTH)

	School of Dentistry	School of Health & Rehabilitation	School of Human Movement Studies	School of Medicine	School of Nursing	School of Pharmacy
Faculty Wide Initiative	Appointment of an Academic Project Officer Introduction of a Faculty Administered program (Ipswich)					
St Lucia Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Coordinator ◆ First year student representative ◆ First year clinical duties with 3rd and 4th year students ◆ Student society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Welcome function and BBQ ◆ Appointment of First Year Coordinator in Speech Pathology ◆ Small tutorial groups in first year ◆ Student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Coordinator ◆ Development of a first year web site ◆ Introduction of PASS program in <i>BIOL1008</i> and <i>BIOL1015</i> ◆ Increased communication through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Full week orientation ◆ First year social functions ◆ Year level coordinators ◆ Year level student representatives on school committees ◆ Student society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Small group introduction to Problem Based Learning (PBL) ◆ Small group program and clinical placement orientations ◆ Peer mentoring at clinical sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of male and female First Year Coordinators ◆ English language exam in first week to identify students who may need help

		society	fortnightly emails to students ◆ Development of first year teaching space and career board. ◆ Student society			◆ Integration of materials and concepts across all first year courses ◆ Student society
Ipswich Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of a First Year Coordinator ◆ Program specific orientation day ◆ Development of a student society ◆ Implementation of CLICS (Connect, Learn, Identify, Communicate, Support) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engagement of student and library services within first year courses ○ <i>Meet the Practitioner</i>: monthly informal sessions with a variety of Health Practitioners ○ Identification of Bachelor of Health Science student cohort: demographics, academic and social integration, academic self-efficacy ○ Evaluation of the above factors with retention and academic achievement 					

1.3.6. Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Veterinary Science (NRAVS) Faculty

The attrition rate in the commencement year for a Bachelor's degree in the NRAVS Faculty in 2005 was 20.4% compared to 20.5% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students in 2001 compared to 2005 decreased by 199 students overall. The most significant drop in actual student numbers was between 2004 and 2005 (a decrease of 243 students).

Mid year intake for 2006 include 127 students, 95 which are based at Gatton (these include 20 who are commencing postgraduate course work). The 75 undergraduate students at Gatton are distributed in the following way; 27 students are enrolled in external mode programs, and 48 enrolled on campus (22 in the Applied Science Diploma, 18 in Applied Science Degrees, 2 in Agribusiness, 1 in Ag Science, 1 in Environmental Management, and 4 as cross institutional enrolments).



The appointment of a Faculty based First Year Student Support Coordinator in mid 2006 was seen as a way of enhancing and improving the experiences and motivation of first year students within the Faculty. High levels of activity in the second half of the year as a result of this appointment were reported to have been well received by internal and external students. The specific aims of the Faculty-based Induction program in 2006 were to:

- ◆ Improve the overall retention rates of students;
- ◆ Enhance student transition to tertiary education and improve student learning;
- ◆ Create student cohesiveness, identity and feelings of belonging;
- ◆ Provide social opportunities for students;
- ◆ Enhance knowledge of career opportunities and pathways; and
- ◆ Successfully integrate new students into the Faculty.

A variety of activities across the five (5) existing schools were implemented at both the Gatton and St Lucia campuses in addition to the traditional Orientation week program. Each of these activities were seen as making valuable steps towards improving overall first year student experience in the Faculty. However, it was recognised that a more cohesive approach between the schools was needed if a whole Faculty approach was to be achieved in the second cycle in 2007. Consideration for further program evaluation development was also needed for 2007.

Table 1.3.6

Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Natural Resources,
Agriculture, and Veterinary Science (NRAVS)

	School of Agronomy & Horticulture	School of Animal Studies	School of Land & Food Sciences	School of Natural & Rural Systems Management	School of Veterinary Science
Faculty wide Initiative	Appointment of First Year Student Coordinator (mid 2006)				
St Lucia Campus			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Student Coordinator (Part-time). ◆ A series of intensive fortnightly field trips to a variety of industry settings for students enrolled in the <i>Plant Production Systems program</i>. ◆ A series of social BBQ lunches for Food and Agricultural Science students. ◆ Possible re-development of the Land and Food Sciences Student Society. ◆ Two day retreat for first year students in Agricultural Science and Food Technology at the Moreton Bay Research Facility 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Carrick submission <i>Group Project Work to Support Integration, Learning and Life Skills in Veterinary Science</i>, Dr Paul Mills, Dr Peter Woodall, Dr Michael Noad, Lissa Ahlstrom, & Pearl Symonds. ◆ Regular school social events. ◆ Guest lectures and alumni brought in to speak with students about future career options.
Gatton Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Integration of staff from SSS, Library and Health Services into first three lectures of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Trial program for students enrolled in <i>Animal Structure and Function</i> program to identify at-risk students. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of Learning Enhancement Coordinator ◆ Invitation of recent graduates to address first year students about their 	

	<p><i>Agricultural and Environmental Biology 1</i></p>	<p>◆ Program for first year students to engage in voluntary farm work</p>		<p>experiences and career directions. Followed by a BBQ. ◆ Development of Industry visits</p>	
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1.3.7. Social and Behavioural Sciences (SBS) Faculty

The attrition rate in the commencement year for a Bachelor's degree in the SBS Faculty in 2005 was 24.1% compared to 19.2% in 2001. The actual number of commencing students in 2001 compared to 2005 increased by 44 students.

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

SBS Faculty Lunchtime Workshops NEW TO UQ IN 2006

In 2006 the SBS Faculty will hold 3 lunchtime workshops to help you find your way as a first year studentwhether you are a school leaver or mature age student.....please come along and let SBS help you make the most of your university experience.....

Dr Julie Duck, SBS Director of Studies, Chair of the SBS Teaching and Learning Committee, and 2004 University Award Winner for Teaching Excellence will host these informal lunchtime workshops.

A light lunch will be provided at each workshop giving students the opportunity to meet other new to UQ students.

Workshop 1 - "Being a Successful Student" will cover topics such as how to manage your workload, note taking and making the most of lectures and more!

Workshop 2 - "Generic Essay Writing Skills" will cover essay writing skills along with topics such as referencing and plagiarism.

Workshop 3 - "Graduate Attributes and Skill Development" will consider the skills you will develop during your program of study at UQ which should improve your chances of graduate employment.

Dates:
Workshop 1 – Friday 10 March 12:00pm – 1:30pm
Workshop 2 – Friday 31 March 12:00pm – 1:30pm
Workshop 3 – Friday 5 May 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Venue:
General Purpose North Building (No 39A), Room 208

In order to finalise catering please RSVP your attendance to the Faculty Learning Support Officer, Ms Laura Roberts on 3346 9936 or laura.roberts@uq.edu.au

The SBS Faculty offers a large range of undergraduate programs in addition to having shared teaching responsibilities with programs offered in ARTS, BACS and EPSA. Thus, the aim of their Faculty-based Induction program 2006 involved a number of strategic localised strategies aimed at enhancing the First Year Experience of students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, under the direct auspices of their Faculty. The primary aim of the program was to develop strategies which would enhance *student learning and study skills* and encourage *exposure to the field of study and professional culture*. The Faculty recognised existing good practices in the

Bachelor of Journalism and Bachelor of Social Science (Public Relations) programs and worked on instigating a more coordinated approach in expanding these practices on a Faculty wide basis.

A two pronged approach in the first cycle was developed for the Induction program. The first prong targeted academic staff teaching at a first year level,

1. Academic Staff

The Faculty endorses high quality teaching in all of their first year courses. They view this strategy as being a major contributor to ensuring an engaging first year experience. They have:

- ◆ Encouraged schools to put *good teachers in first year classes* and expose first year students to world class researchers and leaders in their field or discipline;
- ◆ Encouraged schools (especially those with large first year classes) to ensure there are *good tutorial programs* which provide students with the opportunity to have a *small group experience*;
- ◆ Continued with the SBS Faculty *Tutor Training Program* and continued to provide support for an *Induction for Sessional Staff* program;
- ◆ Used the *Enhanced Student Contribution Funds* to employ additional staff to *reduce staff-student ratios*;
- ◆ Continued the recently introduced Faculty *First Year Experience Teaching Award* which recognises innovative practice aimed at enhancing the first year experience; and
- ◆ Included *workshops on the first year experience* as part of the ongoing Faculty Teaching Events program.

The second prong focused on a suite of activities designed specifically for first year students.

2. First Year Students

These activities included,

- ◆ Redesigning the *Executive Dean's Welcome* in Orientation Week to be more interactive and enable students to be linked at a program level;
- ◆ A separate, by invitation, social event for commencing postgraduate students. It was recognised that many of these students were likely to encounter difficulties in making the transition to study at The University of Queensland;
- ◆ The implementation of three *lunchtime workshops* for new students in semester one (How to be a successful student – included information on note taking and making the most of lectures, Generic essay writing skills, and Graduate attributes and skill development). Closer links with learning advisors in Student Support Services were developed as a result of these workshops;
- ◆ The implementation of a six week *New to UQ Drop-in service* for first year students.

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

New to UQ?

Have all your questions answered at the
SBS Drop in Service

“What is the best way to study for exams?”
“What do I do in tutorials?”
“How do I make the most of my lectures?”
“Where can I go to get help with.....?”
“I need help writing assignments!”
“Help?!?!?”

When: Tuesday 2:30pm to 5:00pm and Thursday 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Where: Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences Conference Room Room 5442 Social Sciences Building (Building 24)
Who: If you have asked yourself any of the questions on this poster, or have any other questions that you want to ask a postgraduate student, please come along to the new SBS Drop in Service in the SBS Faculty during the first 6 weeks of this semester.
How: Make an appointment at the SBS Reception or email laura.roberts@uq.edu.au

If you have any questions about this service or wish to cancel an appointment please contact the Faculty Learning Support Officer, Ms Laura Roberts on 3346 9536 or email laura.roberts@uq.edu.au

Postgraduate students were employed on a casual basis for two afternoons a week for the first six weeks of semester. The aim was to provide first year students with an opportunity to discuss teaching and learning issues as they related to their specific program in an informal setting with an independent person. This service was based on a student mentor approach but involved postgraduate students rather than later year undergraduate students.

- ◆ A series of Faculty coordinated *career planning sessions* in semester two with recent graduates who were currently

Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

Dean's Scholar Program 2006

Do you have what it takes to be part of the SBS Dean's Scholar Program?

SBS Dean's Scholars are recruited from all SBS programs and sequences of study, including students in dual degrees and students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science who have an SBS major.

Students will be invited into the program:

- After completing #16 of full-time study (one year) with a cumulative GPA of 6.25 or above; or
- After completing #32 of full-time study (two years) with a GPA of 6.25 or above in their second year.

Benefits of the SBS Dean's Scholar Program

- Summer research internships
- Priority in exchange programs
- Opportunities for scholarships for exchange and internships
- School recognition and support

SBS Labs:

- \$40 printing credit
- Free 24 hour swipe card

Library:

- Endnote software and training
- \$30 photocopy card

For more information please contact the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences on 07 3365 7487 or see the website www.uq.edu.au/sbs

employed in their field of study. Career planning and options were discussed with undergraduate students in a discipline based format.

- ◆ The continued enhancement of the *Dean's Scholar scheme*. This scheme identifies students with excellent academic records. It provides two Faculty-based social events throughout the year, priority on exchange opportunities, and mentoring opportunities within Schools and summer internship opportunities.

Evaluation of the Induction program was sought in a variety of ways from both academic staff and students; for example, questionnaires, anecdotal evidence, and spontaneous email responses from students after events or sessions. The feedback informed decisions about which programs ran again in the second cycle in 2007 as well as structural changes; for instance, the *New to UQ Drop-in service* changed from a series of face-to-face sessions to a web forum/interface in 2007.

A similar Induction program was implemented in semester two but on a smaller scale because of smaller student numbers in the mid-year intake. The SBS Faculty strongly supported the introduction of a University wide buddy scheme similar to the *Uniguide* program currently implemented at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Particularly as the guides are drawn from every Faculty the potential to develop a strong sense of identity to both Faculty and University in a well executed program would be possible.

Table 1.3.7

Innovative First Year Practice in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

	School of Education	School of Journalism & Communication	School of Political Science & International Studies	School of Psychology	School of Social Science	School of Social Work & Applied Human Sciences
Faculty Wide Initiative	Appointment of Learning Support Officer (3 days/week)					
St Lucia Campus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Well executed strategies and initiatives at a local School level to <i>enhance student learning and study skills</i> and encourage exposure to the field of <i>study and professional culture</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Student Coordinator in 2007. ◆ Development of a School specific approach to addressing the needs and issues of first year students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appointment of First Year Administrator and Tutor Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Well executed strategies and initiatives at a local School level to <i>enhance student learning and study skills</i> and encourage exposure to the field of <i>study and professional culture</i>. 	
Ipswich Campus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Joint collaboration with UQ Ipswich Library – Dr John Harrison, Mr Marcos Riba and Ms Tanya Ziebell. ◆ Well executed 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Well executed strategies and initiatives at a local School level to <i>enhance</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ SBS Teaching Award, 2006, Enhancement of Student Learning – Dr Lesley Jolly and Dr Julie van den Eynde

		<p>strategies and initiatives at a local School level to enhance student learning and study skills and encourage exposure to the field of study and professional culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ SBS Teaching Award, 2006, Enhancement of Student Learning – Dr John Harrison 			<p>student learning and study skills and encourage exposure to the field of study and professional culture.</p>	
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1.3.8. Support Services

With the implementation of the Faculty-based Induction programs in the first cycle there was a significant strengthening of links and appreciation of knowledge and skill between the Faculties and various Support services (for example, Library, Student Support Services, Student Centre, and Union Sporting facilities). While these links were multi-faceted and wide spread, however, an attempt to summarise has been made in the Table 1.3.8, *Innovative First Year Practice Within the Support Units*.

Table 1.3.8

Innovative First Year Practice Within the Support Units

Support Unit	Innovative Practice or Sites of Activity
Library and ITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Involvement in a variety of information sessions as part of Faculty-based Induction programs (All campuses) ◆ Information Skills and Community Outreach ◆ Involvement in localised research activity (for example, Joint collaboration between School of Journalism and UQ Ipswich Library – Dr John Harrison, Mr Marcos Riba and Ms Tanya Ziebell). ◆ Focus Forums and newsletters which include First Year Experience information and activity ◆ Sign on and computer information sessions
Student Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Transition Officer and Learning Support for Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients (All three main campuses; All student year levels) ◆ UQ Link Program (All three main campuses; Development of programs and information sessions for feeder schools, particularly those in low socio-economic areas) ◆ Involvement in a variety of information sessions as part of Faculty-based Induction programs (All campuses) ◆ Ipswich Campus Outreach activities – <i>Mentoring in Schools</i> and <i>Transitioning for Life Conference</i> (aimed at Years 10, 11 and 12 High School Students)
Student Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Orientation ◆ <i>New to UQ</i> web site
Dean of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Orientation ◆ Orientation Working Group – preparation of <i>Parents of New Students</i> information page is under construction as part of the <i>New to UQ</i> web site ◆ <i>New to UQ</i> web site ◆ Student Ambassadors – liaison with feeder schools ◆ Information Day for secondary school Career and Guidance Officers
Student Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ UQ Sports is working collaboratively with Faculties to hold social, non-alcoholic, functions at the beginning of 2007 as part of the Faculty-based Induction programs

1.4. Additional Project Activities

While the major focus of the project was concerned with the Faculty-based Induction programs, there were also additional project related activities which were critical in the overall development and maintenance of the project. Each of these related activities are presented in the following sub-sections.

1.4.1. First Year Experience Project Web Site

A project related web site (see, www.uq.edu.au; type *First Year Experience Project* in the search function located at the top right hand corner and follow the links) was expanded and redesigned by the Project Coordinator at the end of 2005 and updated throughout 2006. The aim was to develop a central, easily accessible online site for people, both within and outside the university, to keep up to date with the project.

1.4.2. First Year Experience University of Queensland Network

Two innovative professional networks were instigated by the author. The first was a First Year Experience University of Queensland Network (FYE UQ Network). This network was open to all interested staff, general and academic, from Faculties, Schools and Support units within the University (It was also open to later year students who were involved in mentoring programs). The network communicated via email and had informal face to face meetings as a means of connecting with others and providing professional support in a non-threatening environment. Members were gathered through word of mouth and via information on the project web site. While this network was small, it grew appreciably during the life of the project and played a vital role in instigating university wide change from a grass roots level.

1.4.3. First Year Experience Queensland Network

The second network was a First Year Experience Queensland University wide Network (FYE QLD Network). This network included First Year Experience Project Coordinators, Learning Advisors or academic Teaching and Learning Chairs from The University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, University of the Sunshine Coast, University of Southern Queensland, Central Queensland University, and James Cook University. This state wide network communicated via email on a regular basis and had face to face meetings on a four monthly rotation at each of the Brisbane-based universities. A number of referred and by-invitation presentations (individual, roundtables and symposiums)

were given throughout the life of the project both within the participating universities and at National functions and conferences.

1.4. Reflections of Instigating Change in A Large Research Intensive University

Instigating and maintaining institution wide change can be slow. It needs a multi pronged approach. Firstly, on-going support and recognition, for instance, personal, emotional, and financial, from the highest levels of senior administration is imperative. However, this needs to occur alongside the growth of innovative practices from the grassroots level; growing from the bottom up. Listening, identifying, recognising, and building on sites of activity, or *points of opportunity*, are also fundamental activities but need to be followed up with evaluation, collection of student and staff feedback, reflection and subsequent activity to provide evidence and action to minimise what can otherwise be seen as *busy work* which does not strategically inform practice or result in improvements for students.

Having a person with good listening and interpersonal skills employed in an ongoing, central coordinating position (preferably in an academic position with excellent administration skills) is important for activity coordination on multiple sites. As is, clear communication between senior administration and other areas of the university, the exchange and connection between information and ideas, maintaining a change momentum, and facilitating communication both within and outside of Faculties and support units which may have previously been stand alone silos.

2. Moving Forward at a Student-Centred University

A change in position and institution with a student centred focus has brought about an opportunity to advance work already begun at a large research intensive university described earlier in this paper. One responsibility of this new academic position is to coordinate the First Year Advisors, with the assistance from the Deans (Learning and Teaching), within each of the 4 groups and across the 5 campuses. There are approximately 30,000 students enrolled at the university. The First Year Advisors roles were instigated in all degree programs in 2005 as a key element in a university wide strategy to improve the overall learning and teaching quality within the institution. It was seen as a way of instigating and maintaining local capacity for what is essentially a collective, institution wide responsibility.

Each of the 5 campuses are diverse in relation to their location, programs offered and distinct cohort of students. Hence the roles, expectations, and activities of the First Year

Advisors while having common elements are essentially varied to ensure the specific needs of the students within their degree programs are met.

The change process at this institution has the commitment and long term support from senior administration, The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Activities and directions in relation to the improvement of first year student experience, and ultimately improvement in institution wide retention rates, is informed by a large scale, systematic, institution wide survey. Future plans involve identifying and understanding key points within the whole student experience whilst maintaining a particular focus on first year students.

3. The Student Experience Model²

As a way of visually representing the student experience, a model has been designed to highlight areas of current activity and identifying gaps. This paper is concerned primarily with the issues surrounding the First Year student experience, hence the identification of key phases leading up to, and including, the first semester of study. Pertinent areas which require high levels of communication and consistency of information between the University, feeder schools, and potential university students are identified. The model also supports work by Krause (2006) who identifies the top five common misconceptions about first year in higher education as,

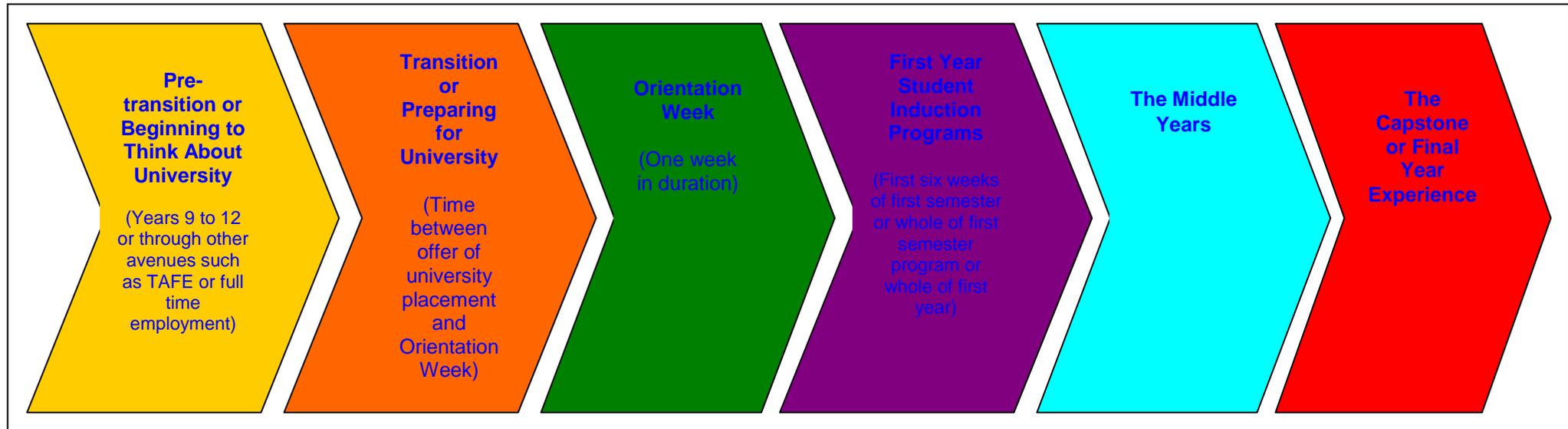
- ◆ “the first year begins at enrolment
- ◆ once we orient students, the task is complete
- ◆ the first year experience is homogeneous: one size fits all
- ◆ first year issues are student support issues
- ◆ first year enrolees evolve into engaged university students just by being part of the university environment” (1).

These misconceptions ultimately fail to address the diverse student population which currently engage in further study in the tertiary sector, or, the complex issues of juggling study with competing family, work and social commitments. Developing and providing sustained academic and social support initiatives for first year students for extended periods of time is vital if institutions are serious about addressing student needs and increasing retention rates (Krause, 2006; Yorke and Thomas, 2003; Zepke, Leach, and Prebble, 2006). The first year and subsequent Induction style programs should not be a collection of activities in Orientation Week or a few stand alone activities scattered throughout the year, but rather, a continuum of cohesive experiences which inform a student’s success or failure in tertiary settings.

² This model is adapted from The University of Queensland First Year Experience Model in Burnett (2006). *The first year experience project report*. Brisbane, Australia: The University of Queensland.

Diagram 3

The Student Experience Model (with a focus on First Year Experience)



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The Student Experience Model identifies six key phases, Pre-transition (or Beginning to Think About University), Transition (or Preparing for University), Orientation Week, First Year Student Induction Programs, The Middle Years, And The Capstone or Final Year Experience. This model provides a holistic view of understanding and enhancing the student experience with a focus on the First Year student experience. A number of these phases actually occur outside the immediate university environment and well before first year students truly arrive on campus. These phases require, and depend upon, the fostering of strong and authentic community links. There are a number of phases which occur after the Capstone phase (for example, engagement with life long learning and post-graduate student experience) but fall outside the focus of this paper.

The following sub-sections will address each of the six phases individually.

3.1. Pre-transition or Beginning to Think About University

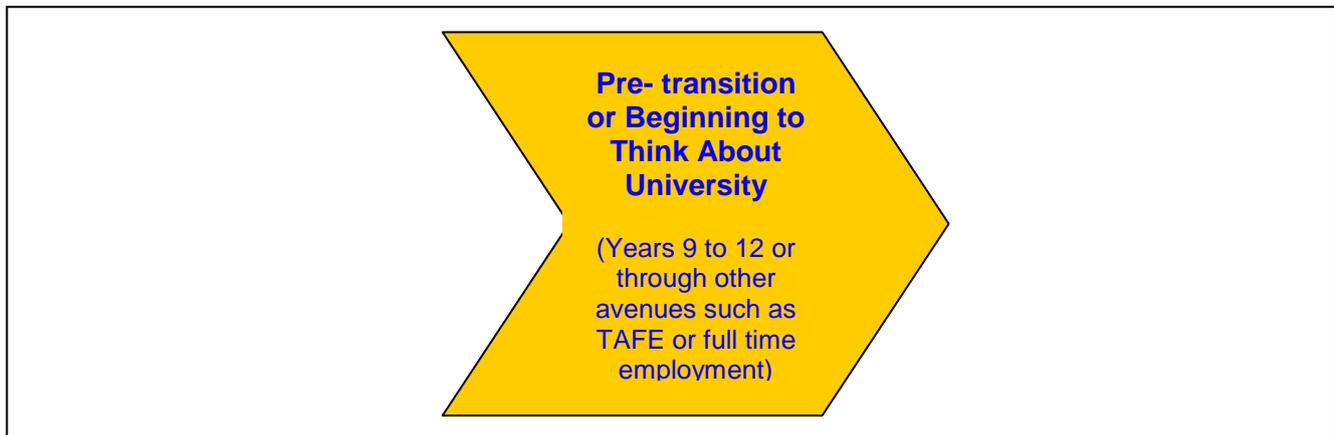
Typically, the university experience is deemed to begin when students arrive on their campus to enrol. Increasingly we are realizing that this narrow view of the first year fails to take account of the many factors that shape student aspirations and expectations regarding university study prior to enrolment

Krause, 2006, 1.

Research (for example, Ellis, 2002; Krause, 2006) indicates that students should, and do, begin to think about university study at increasingly earlier stages of their secondary education. Students base their decisions about possible further study on factors such as relevance for career and future life planning, knowledge and familiarity of programs and university culture, family and work commitments, and financial factors.

Diagram 3.1

Pre-transition or Beginning to Think about University



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Ellis (2002) believes that successful transition into university life starts at secondary school, where students have the ability to access relevant “information to enable them to make informed choices in years 11 and 12 and when they start university. Despite great changes with the introduction of interactive learning methods in the school curriculum, students are rarely prepared to cope with the lack of familiarity at university. They feel both academically and physically lost in the new environment. Everything is different” (p3).

Activities in the area of pre-transition can include information sessions at feeder schools by Student Recruitment Teams, information days for secondary school Career and Guidance counsellors, and *Information Skills and Community Outreach* library programs. Extending programs and developing stronger relationships to wider areas, particularly those in low socio economic and/or rural communities are worth considering. Particularly in light of the declining numbers of enrolling students. It would also be worth strengthening relationships with TAFE Colleges and industry in an effort to break down the barriers

and misconceptions which currently shape students' preconceptions about university life. This phase of the model would also benefit greatly from further research in the area.

3.2. Transition or Preparing for University

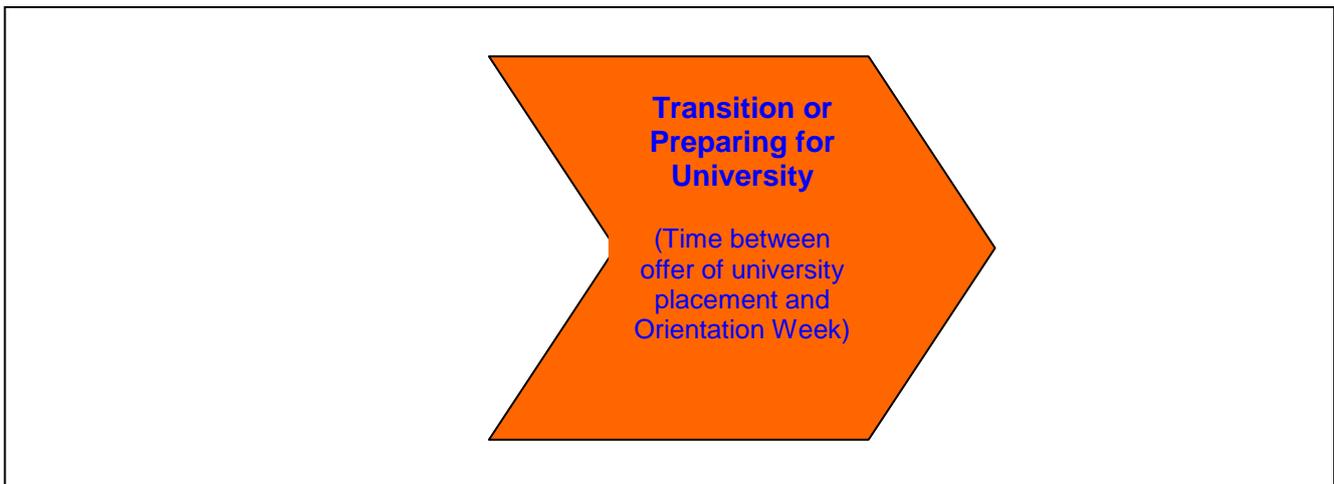
School students usually come from a closely monitored, directive environment and they need various support mechanisms to promote their development and their academic training

Ellis, 2002, 7.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the time lapse between receiving an offer of a university placement and Orientation week is untapped and under-utilised. Students usually have mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension about receiving an offer of a university placement. They have no direct contact with the university at this stage and are unable to ask questions about their program or general university life, nor are they able to begin forming social or support networks with other first year students.

Diagram 3.2

Transition or Preparing for University



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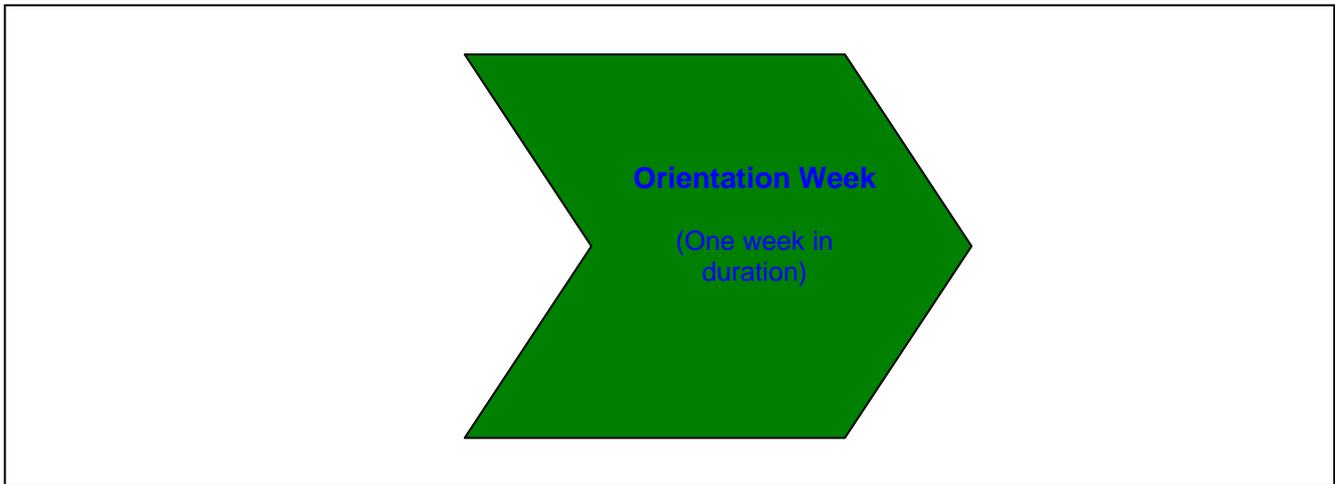
There is great potential to develop general information sessions, and/or networking events, for students during this time to allow them to become familiar with the university campus and facilities without the *busy-ness* of Orientation Week.

3.3. Orientation Week

Most established universities within Australia have a well developed suite of Orientation Week activities. These have been designed to ease new students into the university culture. Events in Orientation week usually focus on social networking (for example, information and demonstrations by student clubs and

societies, free barbeques, market days, and dance parties or concerts), academic skill development (for example, library and information technology sessions, time management courses, and essay writing information sessions), and specific program information (for example, welcome and information sessions either at a Faculty, School or program level).

Diagram 3.3
Orientation Week



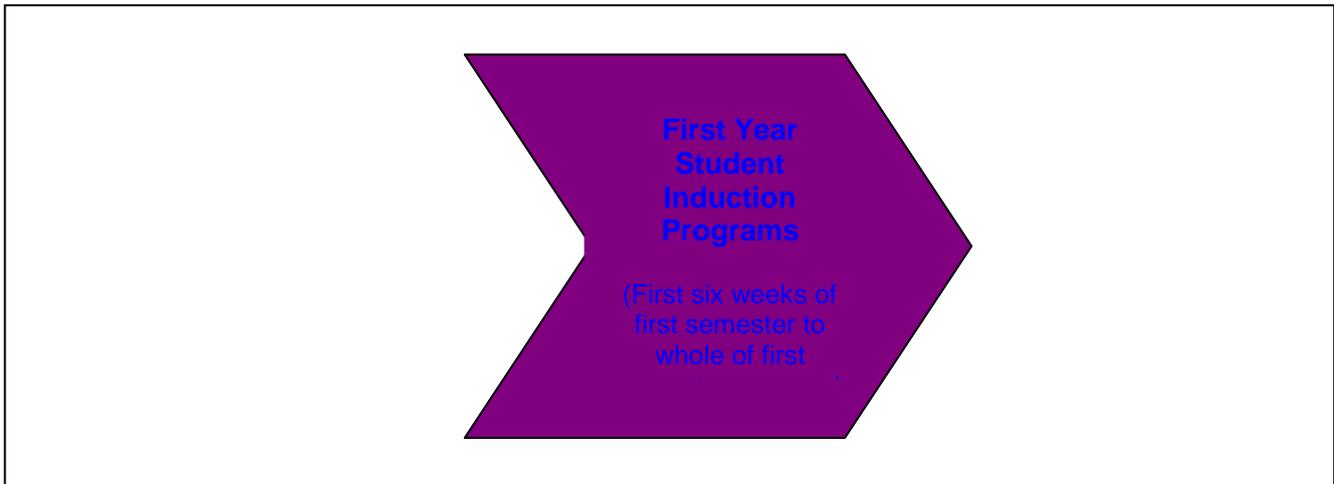
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Student feedback and comments about Orientation activities and information packages are analysed and often led to modifications in future Orientation programs. Current research (for example, Krause, 2006; 2005; Tinto, 2002; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005) in the area of First Year Experience recognizes that while well organized and planned Orientation Week information and activities are essential in welcoming beginning students into the university culture, more sustained and course/program driven activity is needed for successful transition.

3.4. First Year Student Induction Programs

First Year Student Induction programs need to be designed and implemented as student-centred initiatives at a local level to improve first year students' experiences. While each program will have common elements they should essential have unique features to meet the specific needs of their particular student.

Diagram 3.4
First Year Student Induction Programs



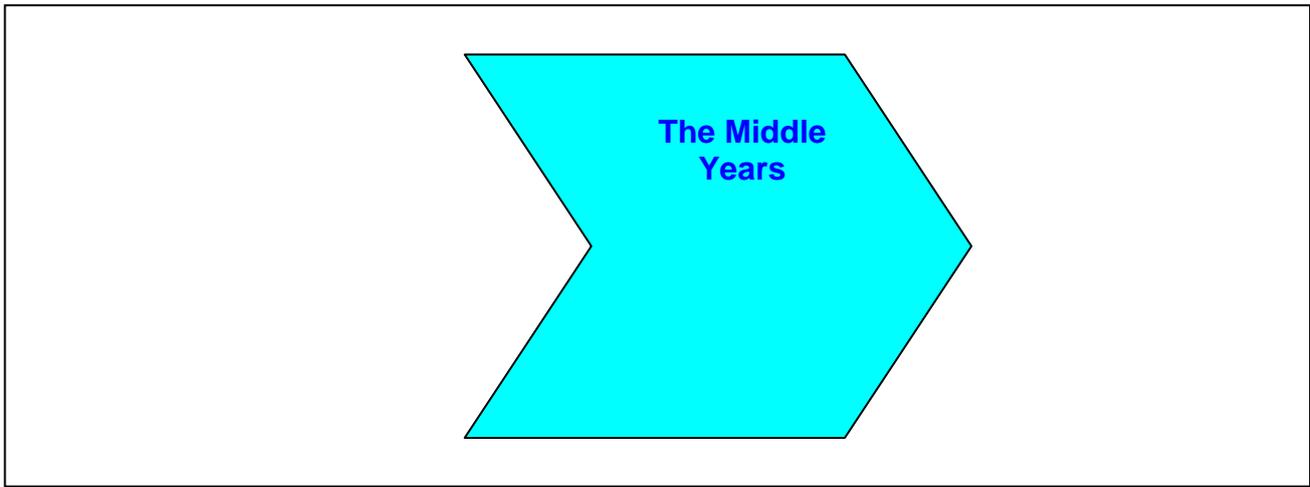
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Continued support from senior levels of the university and maintenance of centralised position is strongly suggested to prevent fragmentation and ensure lasting longevity and ongoing development and implementation of cohesive First Year Student Induction programs.

3.5. The Middle Years

The middle years of undergraduate student experience are worthy of further research, particularly in light of current initiatives for first year students. Anecdotal evidence suggests students feel a significant loss of well structured and appropriate support in their middle years of study. Research in this area could highlight specific issues and needs of middle year students resulting in program development which supports the whole student throughout their undergraduate studies.

Diagram 3.5
The Middle Years

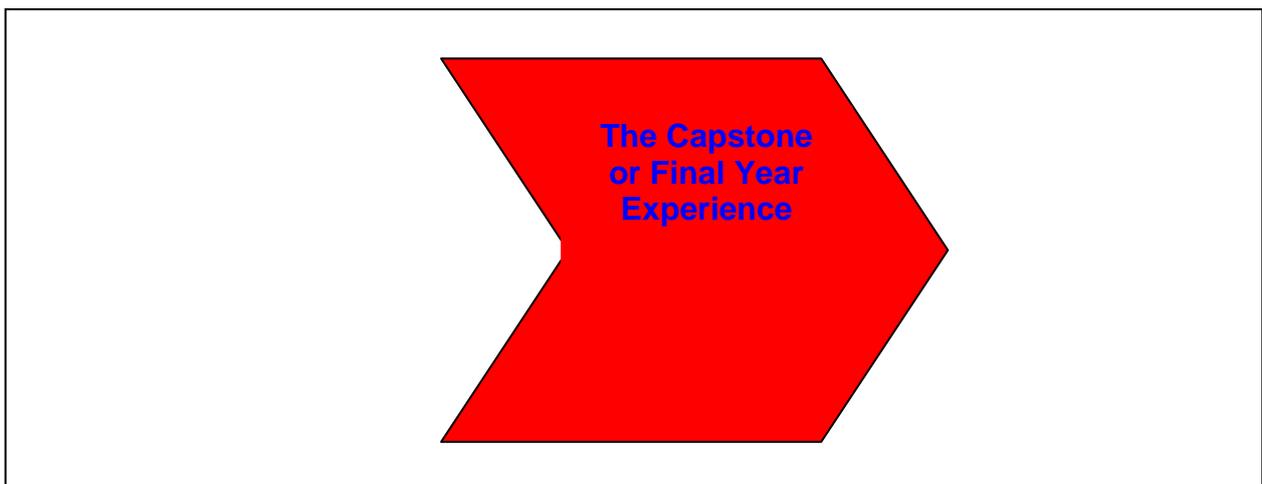


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3.6. The Capstone or Final Year Experience

Again the final year student experience is worthy of greater research, particularly in relation to mapping to institution specific graduate attributes and employment outcomes. Relationships between the Capstone phase and student engagement in life long learning and post-graduate studies also warrant further research.

Diagram 3.6
The Capstone or Final Year Experience



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In conclusion the six phases, Pre-Transition, Transition, Orientation Week, First Year Student Induction Programs, The Middle Years, and The Capstone or Final Year Student Experience, of the model form pivotal sites of activity for a holistic view of understanding and enhancing the student experience. This model should not be seen as activity in isolation, but rather, the beginning of a design which embraces the concepts of life long learning (the whole student experience) and research led teaching.

4. Conclusion

The first year of university is, in fact, the culmination of years of socialization and shaping of an individual's views about whether or not university study is something to which they can and should aspire

Krause, 2006, 1.

This paper has focused on illustrating two examples of how first year student experience initiatives have, and are currently, being undertaken in two Australian universities as part of wider institutional wide change. It has endeavoured to leave readers with three images in relation to the first year student experience, firstly initiatives and institution wide change processes should be focused on keeping doors open for first year students. Programs should be about creating pathways for success, not mazes. And finally, students need strong links and connections with the university context so that when the waters become rough, usually around assessment and exam time, we do not lose them.

Institutions with programs which focus solely on attrition rates as a means of gauging success in retaining and meeting the needs of undergraduate students is hazardous, simply because there is no one definitive cause for students failing to complete their undergraduate studies. Programs which focus on attrition are re-active rather than pro-active. There are multiple reasons why students discontinue their tertiary studies, many of which are framed by their connectedness with the institution, finances, and competing work and family obligations. Further, there is currently no efficient means of tracking students who move between institutions within Australia or return to study after a one or two year absence. Research by Zepke, Leach, and Prebble (2006), like research conducted by Yorke and Thomas (2003), suggests that a learner/student-centeredness approach, "improves retention where students feel they belong in an institutional culture, where they experience good quality teaching and support for their learning and where their diverse learning preferences are catered for" (598).

The author would like to thank and recognise the many people who contributed to the development and refinement of this paper. In particular, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (Director of GIHE, Griffith University), A/Prof Peter Jamieson (University of Melbourne), Dr Helen Byers (The University of Queensland), members of The University of Queensland First Year Experience Network and The University of Queensland Faculty Directors of Studies. Student-centred initiatives require student-centred people who are willing to collaborate.

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