



Articulating a Transition Pedagogy

Preface

Intentional first year curriculum design should mediate a relevant, involving and social transition to tertiary academic study that is not overwhelming to the new learner in the discipline.

It is acknowledged that “first year students”, as multiple cohorts, are extremely diverse. The diverse nature of student progression also means that non-first year students may enrol in first year units of study. This articulation of a “transition pedagogy” – a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design that carefully scaffolds and mediates the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts – is concerned with undergraduate first year curriculum and co-curriculum design, rather than with the experience of commencing students. It also acknowledges that good first year curriculum design must be concomitant with good first year teaching and proactive, just-in-time support and service provision.

The first year of university study is arguably the most crucial time for engaging students in their learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills, not only to persist, but to be successful and independent in their new learning throughout their undergraduate years and for a lifetime of professional practice in which they will be continually required to learn and to engage with new ideas that go beyond the content of their university course. All members of the University, students and both professional and academic staff, have a responsibility in this regard to ensure that the first year curriculum is engaging, supportive, intentional, relevant and social.

This statement acknowledges that certain curriculum design principles stand out as supportive of first year learning engagement, success and retention.

Broad Organising Principles for First Year Curriculum

Good first year curriculum design should abide by the following interconnected organising principles to facilitate all students fully achieving desired learning outcomes.

Transition

The curriculum and its delivery should be designed to be consistent and explicit in assisting students’ transition *from* their previous educational experience *to* the nature of learning in higher education and learning in their discipline as part of their lifelong learning. The first year curriculum should be designed to mediate and support transition as a process that occurs over time. In this way, the first year curriculum will enable successful student transition into first year, through first year, into later years and ultimately out into the world of work, professional practice and career attainment.

Diversity

The first year curriculum should be attuned to student diversity and must be accessible by, and inclusive of, all students. First year curriculum design should recognise that students have special learning needs by reason of their social, cultural and academic transition. Diversity is often a factor that further exacerbates transition difficulties. The first year curriculum should take into account students’ backgrounds, needs, experiences and patterns of study and few if any assumptions should be made about existing skills and knowledge.

‘Diversity’ in this context includes, for example:

- membership of at-risk or equity groups;
- widening participation (eg non-traditional cohorts);
- students’ existing skills and knowledge; and
- patterns and timing of engagement with the first year curriculum (eg mid-year entry).



Design

First year curriculum design and delivery should be student-focussed, explicit and relevant in providing the foundation and scaffolding necessary for first year learning success. This requires that the curriculum must be designed to assist student development and to support their engagement with learning environments through the intentional integration and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Engagement

Learning, teaching, and assessment approaches in the first year curriculum should enact an engaging and involving curriculum pedagogy and should enable active and collaborative learning. Learning communities should be promoted through the embedding in first year curriculum of active and interactive learning opportunities and other opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and teacher-student interaction.

Assessment

The first year curriculum should assist students to make a successful transition to assessment in higher education, while assessment should increase in complexity from the first to later years of curriculum design. Critically, students should receive regular, formative evaluations of their work early in their program of study to aid their learning and to provide feedback to both students and staff on student progress and achievement.

Evaluation and monitoring

Good first year curriculum design is evidence-based and enhanced by regular evaluation that leads to curriculum development and renewal designed to improve student learning. The first year curriculum should also have strategies embedded to monitor all students' engagement in their learning and to identify and intervene in a timely way with students at risk of not succeeding or fully achieving desired learning outcomes.