

FYECD2009 Symposium

Parallel Session Briefing Notes for Keynote Panel Discussion

At each of the Parallel Sessions held on Day 1 of the Symposium, the groups were asked to consider the following and formulate a question to put to the Keynote Panel on Day 2 for them to discuss:

What is the main issue that needs to be addressed by your institution and/or the sector regarding the first year experience and first year curriculum design?

The questions/briefing notes prepared for the Panel at each of the Parallel Sessions were as follows:

Transition

- How do we foster co-ordinated institutional commitment to transition across all staff (academic and professional), championed by senior leadership, backed by sustainable funding and long-term planning, especially in an environment of constant restructuring and uncertainty?
- How do we manage/support the transition from VET/TAFE/International school-based learning and assessment to a uni-based one within the first year curriculum – managing disparate learning experiences to the new uni environment?
- How do we ensure adequate, accessible support services and resources are available to staff and students and that these are promoted and referred to in a timely and appropriate manner?
- How do you evaluate a transition plan?
- What is the overarching set of principles for a successful first year transition that can guide individual universities to meet their strategic aims?

Diversity

- Change – how do we shift the sector from a reactive unintegrated approach to a proactive integrated approach in engaging with student diversity? As part of this, how do we begin to influence the “non-believers”?
- Staff – how do we ensure that staff who are passionate about engaging in best practice are supported, recognised and rewarded?

- Practice - what does an excellent classroom look like – as modelled on universal design principles?

Design

- Engage and motivate the whole university community (including leadership) in designing sustainable FY curriculum (eg, no large core subject) which engages and motivates students.
- To get uni and faculty leadership and faculty academics to engage with all key stakeholders in the creation of a coherent, integrated, holistic, sustainable curriculum.
- How to achieve sustainable, consistent staff-owned good practice including a setting with no core units.
- How to change the model of having large first year courses containing huge diversity and then how to design the course when the model changes.
- To design learning experiences which strengthen a sense of self individually and within groups as a motivated learner.
- Engage and motivate students.
- How to motivate and interest academics to respect and collaborate with professional staff in equal partnership to design and move first year curriculum to reality.
- To reconcile tension between customer service ethos leading to taped lectures and an inability to engage if don't turn up.

Engagement

Engagement Issues

- **How do we engage staff? (our unengaged colleagues!)**
- Updating professional knowledge (PD support)
- Institutional Leadership and buy-in – team OK ... beyond this we need Deans, DVCs, VCs etc
- **Focus on retention (budget issues) - need to move beyond the rhetoric to putting money where it matters.**
- How do we get ourselves to live the rhetoric; how do we model ourselves amongst our own peers? Engagement to pervade the sector?
- Peer observation – to encourage, provide positive feedback, to foster collaborative culture

- Need for ongoing conversations about engagement, across the institution...
- Standard student evaluation processes – discouraging ... and disengaging. They result in academics focussing on non-engagement related approaches (eg spoon-feeding students to get a good result).
- Relevance to curriculum improvement? Impact of and interaction between these issues
- How do we engage students – the student perspective is often: “just tell me what I have to do”
- Student expectations. Do they want to be engaged? How do we connect with their reality about learning? Facebook... communication patterns that are different to ‘ours’.
- We need to gain knowledge of the students and their patterns of engagement – for us to engage with them – this is an important issue esp for other cultures
- Need to understand the ways that we can engage – cf Col’s perspectives – the stories of our students
- How is ‘good’ teaching recognised? Difficult to engage the staff – to value teaching so staff value engagement. Changing other staff’s expectations about what ‘teaching’ can involve.
- “What is engagement? To what end? For what purpose? We need a common understanding of the **complexities and multi-dimensional nature of engagement to ground the discussion.**
- **Rhetoric... Overemphasis on cognitive engagement of social, emotional, practical, kinaesthetic. Cognitive depends on all the other forms of engagement**
- Budgets – elearning – vs F2F - different ends of spectrum; need an adequate understanding of resourcing requirements for engagement in different learning environments.
- Sessional staff – their opportunities to engage...
- Social engagement between staff and students
- **Is engagement the means or the end? Process by which it may happen – has it become an end in itself?**
- Student diversity; ratios;
- Skill set required for the different modes = different types of engagement
- Different pedagogies for different modes
- To get institutional change we need to engage the staff
- Pockets of engagement; how to scale up and make engagement sustainable?

Critical Questions for the Sector

- What is engagement ... student-student, student-staff, student-material?
- How do we include all the differences (cognitive, social, cultural etc etc)?

- How do we engage with large cohorts of distance ed students? As well as F2F classes?
- How do we achieve engagement as: Institution long and institution wide?
- Breadth and depth and longevity – how do we make engagement sustainable?

THE Critical Questions for the Sector

1. How do we define 'engagement'?
2. How do we move from rhetoric to action (with both students AND staff) ...
3. How do we implement engagement across our Institutions to enable learning communities to exist? And then to make them sustainable?

Assessment

- For students ...
How do we find the right balance in terms of assessment structure between challenging students and also enhancing the transition process?
- For design, policy and people...
What sort of processes (eg. change management) are necessary to achieve holistic, sustainable, equitable FYE assessment and how do we change the culture to recognise the imperative of FYE?

Evaluation and Monitoring

- How do we address evaluation across the range of units. All units are not equal. Students must complete core units. Problems comparing apples with oranges.
- What strategies could be used to deploy a range of data to formatively improve the first year experience, including identifying and supporting at-risk students in an efficient and timely manner?
- Challenge = to create a model that is nationally funded to responsibly and effectively use reliable and valid (not all units are equal) data to improve the first year learning experience in a way that reflects the diversity of the sector and across disciplines and the institution.
- What is the value of comparing at institutional level – is there value in creating a new instrument to do this?