

Faculty of Education First Year Experience Commitments

Background

A recommendation from the report on the 2011-2013 STAR project was that the Faculty develop a set of first year experience principles to underpin future Transition and Retention work. To this end the Transition Coordinators plus Barney Dalgarno and Jo-Anne Reid with the assistance of Helen van Huet (Academic Staff Development (Inclusive Practice)Coordinator) came together over two days to develop a set of First Year Experience Commitments. These commitments have been derived from a series of nationally recognised learning and teaching guidelines and principles, as well as the findings from STAR and other CSU HEPPP funded initiatives (see references section below).

Commitments executive summary

The following are the commitments. Later in this document each commitment is explained in more detail with reference to relevant literature.

Orientation

1. All students commencing university study (whether they be internal, direct from school, mature aged, industry entry or post graduate) will be offered comprehensive orientation to university study including synchronous sessions (face to face or online), online resources and asynchronous online activities.

Subject content and design

2. First year subjects will explicitly address student literacy, numeracy and academic skill development needs within their design and activities and resources to support this development will be provided within on campus teaching and online study schedules in cooperation with Academic Success and the Library.
3. All first year subjects will be designed to cater for student social, cultural and academic diversity within the subject materials, learning activities and assessment

Student learning experience within subjects

4. All first year on campus and distance subjects will be designed to include activities which require some form of asynchronous or synchronous engagement with peers and teaching teams.
5. First year on campus subjects will include some classes where content delivery will be recorded and online alternatives provided for interactive aspects of the class and some classes where attendance is expected, and the attendance requirements within the subject will be made explicit in the subject outline.
6. All first year distance subjects will include some online synchronous classes but these will not be compulsory and they will be recorded for later viewing by those unable to attend

Supporting students at risk

7. Convenors/coordinators of first year subjects will identify and contact students at risk of failure or withdrawal.

Assessment

8. Capabilities will be gradually developed and assessed and the first assessment task will be a low stakes task in all first year undergraduate subjects
9. Course directors or delegates will work with subject teams within and outside the Faculty each session to ensure a cohesive design and balanced schedule of assessment tasks across first year subjects in the one course
10. Assessment tasks and learning activities will be explicitly aligned to the learning objectives of the subject
11. Plain language will be used in assessment task descriptions, rubrics and study schedules within Subject Outlines to ensure that these descriptions are explicit and accessible to a diverse range of students.
12. Feedback to students on their assessment activities will be constructive, offer meaningful pathways for improvement in subsequent tasks and be explicitly aligned to the criteria and standards within the assessment task description.

Process of developing the commitments

The aim of this work was to come up with commitments meeting the following characteristics:

- Are direct and unambiguous and so the question of whether a subject or course meets a specific commitment can be unambiguously determined;
- Consist of a single sentence;
- Are supported by a longer elaboration which clarifies any specialised terminology and provides examples to aid implementation;
- Are cross referenced to relevant literature.

The first step was to derive from the body of literature reviewed a set of broad categories of commitment. The outcome of this was the identification of the following categories:

- Inclusive pedagogical practices, catering for diversity (Kift, 2009);
- Inclusive content, building on different prior knowledge bases (Devlin et al., 2012);
- Assessment design, including alignment, clarity of description, early low stakes tasks, feedback quality and authenticity (Kift, 2009);
- Course level student engagement, and wider student experience (Kift, 2009);
- Content organisation and sequencing (Kift, 2009);
- Provision of resources
- Clarity of expectation, explicit (Kift,2009; Devlin, 2012);
- Learning environment organisation
- Student centred, learning focused (Kift,2009; Devlin, 2012);
- Scaffolded, developmental (Kift, 2009);

- Collaborative design of curriculum, assessment and learning experience within and across subjects (Devlin, et al., 2012)
- Explicit connection to services and resources from other bodies in the university (e.g. library, academic success) (STAR reports)
- Developing autonomous learners
- Identifying and supporting students potentially at risk (Kift, 2009);
- Evaluation and reflection (Kift,2009; Devlin, 2012);
- Flexibility in nature of learning experience and pathway towards achievement of outcomes (James, Krause & Jennings, 2010); Scott, 2008, Devlin, 2012);
- Professional expectations
- Student peer collaboration (e.g as part of required on campus task, or as part of assessable online task etc) (Devlin, 2012; Kift, 2009);
- Availability and responsiveness of teaching and academic support staff (Devlin, 2012);
- Orientation to courses, subjects and to specific aspects of subjects (e.g. distributed collaborative approaches) (Kift, 2009);
- Literacy, numeracy and academic skills development (e.g. mapping to subjects, screening tests, relating to ALLaN GLOs); and
- Workplace learning (ie. Provision early, relating to curriculum and assessment in subjects) – Linda (and Anne) (Trede, in press).

Following this, commitments were drafted to address each category and then this draft set was further refined with the aim of identifying a set of a maximum of 12 commitments. In the following section the commitments are described in detail along with clarifying text, supporting literature and the category from above which each commitments addresses.

Commitments in detail

Orientation

<p>1. All students commencing university study (whether they be internal, direct from school, mature aged, industry entry or post graduate) will be offered comprehensive orientation to university study including synchronous sessions (face to face or online), online resources and asynchronous online activities.</p>	
<p>Clarifying text</p>	<p>This can be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course teams working closely with Orientation and DE Outreach teams in Academic Success to ensure that university wide orientation meets the students' needs • Having face to face orientation sessions for on campus students • Having online sessions in Adobe Connect or similar for distance students • Providing comprehensive on line orientation information including course specific and generic university information • Providing support material on line that can be accessed by students at all times • Providing links online to information about university support services and course structures • Ensuring that all subject coordinators design subject information to include orientation information about the subject
<p>categories/themes/ideas</p>	<p>orientation</p>

Subject content and design

<p>2. First year subjects will explicitly address student literacy, numeracy and academic skill development needs within their design and activities and resources to support this development will be provided within on campus teaching and online study schedules in cooperation with Academic Success and the Library.</p>	
Clarifying text	<p>This design work needs to be done in such a way as to minimise duplication and ensure a cohesive developmental experience for students.</p> <p>This commitment applies to all first year subjects offered by the Faculty of Education as well as first year subjects offered by other faculties specifically for students in Faculty of Education courses.</p> <p>In Smart Learning courses this design will occur within the course design process with the support of ALLaN specialists in Academic Success.</p> <p>Course Director(s) (or nominee) and first year teaching teams will also need to meet each session to map and refine the developmental activities and resources scheduled and embedded each session.</p> <p>These activities and resources should be integrated within the subject content and focus.</p> <p>Involvement of Orientation, DE Outreach, ALLaN, Library and other resource staff could be facilitated through guest lectures or tutorials (on campus or through Adobe Connect) or asynchronously using podcasts.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic literacy and numeracy library skills APA referencing ICT skill development. <p>In addition to the sequencing of sessions and the embedding of resources to develop specific capabilities in a generic way the meta-language of a subject will also need to be explicitly taught.</p> <p>This could be checked through the feedback process within Smart Learning courses and/or the pre subject moderation process.</p>
Supporting references	STAR Report
categories/themes/ideas	Orientation, Explicit connection to services and resources from other bodies in the university (e.g. library, academic success)

3. All first year subjects will be designed to cater for student social, cultural and academic diversity within the subject materials, learning activities and assessment	
Clarifying text	<p>This includes the expectation that academic staff are aware of who their students are (knowing and respecting students and building cultural capital around unpacking implicit university practices).</p> <p>This provides opportunities within learning and teaching to (building on prior learning) acknowledge students previous skills and knowledge and provides equitable opportunities to widen participation towards academic development for life-long learning.</p> <p>Principles of inclusive pedagogy are a part of this commitment, as well as the idea of catering for diversity through multi-modality in resources and learning activities and flexibility in learning pathways through subjects.</p> <p>Recognition of the time constraints students are faced with in attending classes if they need to undertake paid and unpaid work in conjunction with their studies is a part of this.</p> <p>Awareness of the cost and availability of textbooks and other required resources such as computer and peripheral hardware and software is another part of this.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each subject will contain a range of learning opportunities that cater for a variety of learning styles for example; written genres, optional/choices within tasks; oral/vivas' and are culturally sensitive - Subjects will include evidence of ongoing scaffolding within course work and assessment with increasing complexity. - Subjects will provide opportunities in the learning process for knowledge sharing and generation. - Subjects will have evidence of inclusive teaching and learning practices and support structures embedded within subjects, for the benefit of all students. - Subjects will contain a variety of assessment types and have regular opportunities for students to have regular formative evaluation and feedback on their work. <p>This could be checked through the feedback process within Smart Learning courses and/or the pre subject moderation process.</p>
Supporting references	(Kift, 2009) (Devlin 2012)
categories/themes/ideas	Inclusive practice

Student learning experience within subjects

4. All first year on campus and distance subjects will be designed to include activities which require some form of asynchronous or synchronous engagement with peers and teaching teams.	
Clarifying text	<p>The ideal way to address this is to include assessable cooperative learning activities, which require meaningful contributions from all students. While it is not essential that all subjects include such activities, the course should be designed so that full-time student undertake at least one such assessable activity each semester during the first year of their program. In other subjects such engagement may include group activities in class time for on campus subject, synchronous online sessions for distance students, group activities through online discussion forums, or peer assessment. The inclusion of work integrated learning within first year programs is another strategy to ensure student engagement with peers and teaching teams.</p> <p>The design of programs to ensure that this commitment is met will occur through Smart Learning or through meetings of course teams facilitated by the Course Director or delegate. First year teaching teams will meet to identify strategies for enhancing student engagement. These strategies will be adopted within subjects across the first year.</p>
Supporting references	Kift (2009) + Trede & McEwan (in press).
categories/themes/ideas	Student engagement-

5. First year on campus subjects will include some classes where content delivery will be recorded and online alternatives provided for interactive aspects of the class and some classes where attendance is expected, and the attendance requirements within the subject will be made explicit in the subject outline.	
Clarifying text	<p>In a traditional lecture/workshop model the lectures will be recorded through CSU Replay and online participation will be an alternative to attendance. In some cases a 'flipped' classroom model will also be used so that all lectures are provided online.</p> <p>In lecture/workshop models, attendance at workshops would normally be expected and timetabling will ensure some flexibility in which workshops a student is assigned to.</p>
categories/themes/ideas	Flexibility in nature of learning experience and pathway towards achievement of outcomes

6. All first year distance subjects will include some online synchronous classes but these will not be compulsory and they will be recorded for later viewing by those unable to attend	
Clarifying text	This is consistent with the online learning commitments.
categories/themes/ideas	Flexibility in nature of learning experience and pathway towards achievement of outcomes

Supporting students at risk

<p>7. Convenors/coordinators of first year subjects will identify and contact students at risk of failure or withdrawal.</p>	
<p>Clarifying text</p>	<p>The overall intent of this commitment is that first year teaching staff assume a pastoral care role for students in their classes to the extent that this is feasible. Subject convenors/coordinators of first year subjects in consultation with the teaching team will nominate a procedure (or mechanisms) in each subject for identifying disengaged students or students at risk of failure or withdrawal from the subject.</p> <p>Subject convenors/coordinators will attempt to contact disengaged students using email or telephone and notify them of available options and support (including the availability of support services within the university and mechanisms for seeking special consideration or withdrawal).</p> <p>A mechanism for recording contact with such students will be instigated and teaching teams will be responsible for recording the list of identified students and the outcome of their attempts to contact them.</p> <p>Examples of possible triggers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of attendance - Poor performance on a quiz - Lack of online engagement - not accessing Subject Outlines - Lack of learning activity engagement - behaviour in tutorials and/or lectures - non-submission of assessment task(s) - poor performance on early assessment task. <p>The inclusion of a checklist within the post subject moderation form to indicate whether this has occurred could be considered.</p>
<p>Supporting references</p>	<p>Kift (2009), Dalgarno (2014)</p>
<p>categories/themes/ideas</p>	<p>Identifying and supporting students potentially at risk</p>

Assessment

8. Capabilities will be gradually developed and assessed and the first assessment task will be a low stakes task in all first year undergraduate subjects	
Clarifying text	<p>Low stakes tasks are tasks which will not contribute substantially to the final grade for students who make a genuine attempt but do not achieve a satisfactory outcome and so will not result in early failure of the subject.</p> <p>Examples of low stakes tasks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A task with a low assessment weighting (normally such tasks would be undertaken early and feedback would be provided in time for students to build on the feedback in undertaking the second assignment; normally at least three assessment items will be required in this case) - A task with a high assessment weighting but with resubmission allowed for all students not receiving a pass mark <p>In addition to resubmission to ensure that the first assessment task is a low stakes task, resubmission for genuine attempts at assessment tasks which do not achieve a satisfactory outcome is encouraged for all first year assessment tasks.</p> <p>This will be ensured by subject design teams within the Smart Learning process and by Subject Coordinators/Convenors and Quality Assurance Consultants as part of pre subject moderation.</p> <p>In courses where there are a range of subjects that could be taken in the first year, wherever passable this commitments should apply to all subjects that are typically taken in the first year.</p>
Supporting references	Kift (2009)
categories/themes/ideas	Assessment design - early low stakes

9. Course directors or delegates will work with subject teams within and outside the Faculty each session to ensure a cohesive design and balanced schedule of assessment tasks across first year subjects in the one course	
Clarifying text	<p>As well as staggering the due dates there should also be variety in the assessment formats offered within and across subjects during a session. Some of this design work will occur in Smart Learning but schedules will probably need to be agreed upon each session. The faculty could consider appointing first year coordinators within course leadership teams for large courses to take some of this responsibility.</p> <p>E.g., Essays for all first assessment tasks within a session would not be appropriate. Alternatives include: reports, online tasks, tests, digital stories, movies, presentations, teaching resources etc.</p>
Supporting references	Devlin, et al. (2012)
categories/themes/ideas	<p>Content organisation and sequencing</p> <p>Student experience</p> <p>Collaborative design of curriculum, assessment and learning experience within and across subjects</p> <p>Assessment Design (Flexible)</p>

10. Assessment tasks and learning activities will be explicitly aligned to the learning objectives of the subject	
Clarifying text	Specifically each assessment task must be aligned to one or more of the subject's learning outcomes and all outcomes must be aligned to at least one assessment task. Additionally student experience designs and/or study schedules should also be clearly aligned to learning outcomes. In Smart Learning courses this will be ensured by design teams and providers of feedback as part of the Smart Learning design process and peer feedback tools within the course space. In other courses this will be ensured by Subject Convenor/Coordinators and Quality Assurance Officers through items on the Pre-subject moderation checklist. Subject design teams, Subject Convenor/Coordinators and Quality Assurance Officers.
Supporting references	Devlin, et al., 2012, p. 24
categories/themes/ideas	Assessment design (e.g. alignment)

11. Plain language will be used in assessment task descriptions, rubrics and study schedules within Subject Outlines to ensure that these descriptions are explicit and accessible to a diverse range of students.	
Clarifying text	Subject Outlines need to be written using clear and accessible (everyday) language. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear or thorough explanations of assessment tasks are included within Subject Outlines, including definitions of terms ideally within a glossary. - At the start of session, the Subject Outline including assessment tasks should be explained and supported with examples of what is expected to ensure student understanding (Devlin et al., 2012). - The expectations and the marking criteria/rubric for each assessment task should also be explained during the session. - Where practicable the provision of high, medium and low performance exemplars is encouraged. This will be checked by peers within the Smart Learning design process and Quality Assurance Consultants as part of pre-subject Moderation.
Supporting references	Devlin, et al. (2012)
LCP/LD	
categories/themes/ideas	Clarity of expectation, explicit

12. Feedback to students on their assessment activities will be constructive, offer meaningful pathways for improvement in subsequent tasks and be explicitly aligned to the criteria and standards within the assessment task description.	
Clarifying text	This will be ensured by Quality Assurance Consultants through the During-subject moderation processes. Some changes to the During-subject checklist on the Assessment and Moderation Record will be required. Example marked assignments provided to sessional staff should model the quality of feedback required. Feed forward strategies which require students to explicitly address feedback provided on a previous assignment in the subsequent assignment are encouraged where assignments are linked.
Supporting references	STAR Report p26 Hattie and Timperley(2007), Kift (2009)
categories/themes/ideas	Feedback Quality

References

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