



Key Findings for University Staff

First in Family: Educators of FiF Students

FIF STUDENTS ARE HIGHLY CAPABLE WHEN GIVEN SUPPORT

Competing work and life demands can make studying at university hard for FiF students. However, FiF students also demonstrate that they are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed.

Early engagement with the academic environment and developing a sense of identity as a student contributes to their success.

FiF students may find the transition to university more challenging given they are unlikely to have someone close to them to explain what it will be like and what will be expected of them.

“Having someone I can lean on in my family to teach me or show me the way would have been a great help. When you’re the first of your family to do anything, you are essentially just exploring and learning the pitfalls and the traps. Once you’ve gone through, you can tell and teach other people what to do and what not to do.”

Not having parents or older siblings to pass on advice about university systems and processes means that FiF students rely more heavily on friends and university websites to shape their understandings of what university is like.

Lack of time and money due to having other competing demands in their lives, such as work and family, are two factors continuously challenging FiF students. They may require more explicit and clearer instructions on course requirements, but providing explicit and clear instructions helps all students

What does this mean for you?

Establish clear expectations from the outset: You can play a critical role in assisting FiF students develop an understanding of what is required in your course and how they can be successful at university.

Spell it out: You may find it frustrating to have to explain your expectations and requirements in clear detail to FiF students in their first year but keep in mind that this will help ease their transition to university life. Also be aware that being clear and spelling things out may benefit other students also unsure but too nervous to ask.

BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students
- FiF students attending university may find they need to take the time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them
- Many FiF students come from either a regional or remote or low socio-economic background, are mature-aged and/or are Indigenous
- Mature Age FiF students are likely to go to university to improve their job prospects and earning potential. Whereas, almost 80% of school leaver FiF students choose their degree based on interest
- As the government initiative to widen participation supports a greater diversity of individuals to access higher education more students who are FiF are likely to feel that university is an option for them



EXPECTATIONS MAY BE MORE REALISTIC

FiF students are more likely to anticipate that the standard of work required at university will be different to High School. They are likely to anticipate that the approachability of staff at university will be different to High School.

Mature age FiF students typically expect to study more per week than other students: meaning they enter university with realistic expectations about how much study is required.

“Understanding that, unlike school, a lot of learning must be done in your own time. Figuring out how to balance everything was the hardest part, but once it was balanced it made my experience more successful.”

What does this mean for you?

This is good news for educators: If you set out your expectations clearly and spark their interest, you will get the most out of FiF students, and they will be more likely to succeed at university.

UNIVERSITY LECTURES AND COMMUNICATION

Commencing FiF students are more likely to believe that it is important to attend lectures than non FiF students. Some FiF students found it hard to get used to the complex language used by educators.

What does this mean for you?

Use plain English as much as possible: If your language is simple and easy to understand this will help keep first year FiF students engaged and enthusiastic.

“I feel that many of the lecturers are incredibly helpful, and very willing to spend time explaining things to students that don't quite understand a concept or issue.”

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO INFLUENCE

Our research has shown that over 70% of FiF students believe that having lecturers who are enthusiastic about teaching helped their learning. Evidence suggests that higher education strengthens FiF student's sense of competency and confidence, contributes towards broadening of their social experiences, and transforms perspectives.

Research suggests that although FiF students take longer to develop their academic skills and confidence, once their first year at university has been successfully navigated, their confidence and ability to succeed matches their non- FiF peers. However their growth as students is dependent on the support they received and the networks they established; FiF students identified that a bit of help from university teaching staff made a huge difference.

“It has been important for me that my lectures are interesting, and that the lecturers actually care about and are interested in the content, because then it is more interesting to me and I am more motivated to work to my best ability.”

What does this mean for you?

Impact: Don't underestimate the role you can play in shaping the experiences and developing the capabilities of FiF students.

Patience: Be patient with FiF students who may be taking time to adjust to university life and the associated demands.

Support: Provide extra encouragement and support to FiF students. Tell them where to find help if you think they need it. Any extra support you provide is bound to create a long term impact. Develop the First Year curriculum so that support is embedded whenever possible and learning is scaffolded.

“I feel very much included in not just the social aspect of the student life, but very much taken under the wing of the academics in the Department as well, they've looked after us all so well, they love us, they look after us.”

YOUR FEEDBACK IS HIGHLY VALUED

More FiF students, particularly school leavers, deeply value feedback from educators and strongly agreed that feedback on drafts and their submitted work would be important to their learning. The encouraging news is that many FiF students strongly agreed that sufficient feedback was provided on their submitted work.

What does this mean for you?

Focus on positive feedback: Provide detailed constructive feedback on assessments to FiF students, knowing that this will assist them to improve their standard of work and overall learning and encourage them to persevere and thrive.

Encourage and support: Remember that FiF students may take six months to one year to adjust to university life and expectations so any encouragement and support offered will help them on their way to adjusting as quickly as possible.