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.

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.

“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.”

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.

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.”"