Resources used in the First Year Support Strategies (FYSS) portal and related sites
Understanding first year students

Kerri-Lee Krause (2006) identified and challenged five common misconceptions surrounding student success in the first year of higher education. She suggests:

1. The first year does not begin at enrolment, it begins well before then.
2. Once we orient students, the task is not complete. Students in their first year require ongoing, scaffolded support.
3. The first year experience is not homogeneous, each individual student is different and has their own complex set of aspirations, challenges and concerns.
4. First year issues are not student support issues; they are everyone’s issues.
5. First year students do not evolve into engaged university students just by being part of the environment. They require a great deal of help and support.
First year students misunderstand

Five things:

– staff accessibility / work structure
– amount and standard of study required
– independence / time management
– learning skills
– drafts and feedback

(Brinkworth et al, 2009-2012)
‘It is important to recognise that transition extends beyond the “to” university focus. There is a need to support students “through” their first year at university as they learn to manage a new and challenging learning environment. This can be addressed through good curriculum design across the first year.’

(Kift, 2009)
Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education

1. Good practice encourages student-faculty contact
2. Good practice encourages cooperation among students
3. Good practice encourages active learning
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback
5. Good practice emphasizes time on task
6. Good practice communicates high expectations
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

(Chickering & Gamson, 1987)
Six practical strategies for engaging LSES* students

1. Know and respect your students.
2. Offer them flexibility, variety and choice.
4. Scaffold your students’ learning.
5. Be available and approachable to guide your students’ learning.
6. Practice reflectively.

* Low socioeconomic status

(Devlin et al, 2012)
Recommendations when working with FiF* students

Recommendations for teaching and professional staff:

− Recognise that higher education is a transformative experience
− Know your student cohort
− Build a sense of community on campus
− Make expectations clear
− Use accessible language
− Be approachable and enthusiastic about your teaching
− Promote health and wellbeing
− Encourage help seeking

* First in Family

(King et al, 2015)
Transition pedagogy principles

- **Transition**: help students understand what is required of them at university and within their discipline
- **Diversity**: recognise that within each cohort students' entering knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes are varied, and ensure that your teaching is as inclusive of all student cohorts as possible
- **Design**: activities are student-focused and provides a foundation so that further learning may be scaffolded. It should be explicit and relevant – forming a coherent, integrated basis for all future learning
- **Engagement**: engage students in innovative and collaborative ways
- **Assessment**: assessment practices aid learning, are appropriate and ensure feedback is timely, well-articulated and constructive
- **Evaluation and monitoring**: monitor student engagement and performance and allow timely intervention in aid of students at risk

(Kift, 2009)
Ideas for using Transition Pedagogy Principles in the Flinders University context

First Year Curriculum Principle - Transition

A well designed first year curriculum can support a student’s transition into university, regardless of their previous experience. Helping students understand what is required of them at university and within their discipline can also support the development of their approaches to lifelong learning.

Strategies that may support transition include:

- asking students to assess the knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes they have when they commence your topic against discipline and/or topic expectations;
- devoting class time to discussing the particular approaches that are in use and what expectations these approaches place on the student and staff; and
- consideration of the inclusion of a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) topic within the course at first year so that students may gain an appreciation of what the discipline requires.

See also: www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/transition.jsp

First Year Curriculum Principle - Diversity

It is possible that student diversity (which covers a great range of differences including socio-economic, culture, experience, age, nationality) may intensity issues experienced by students as they transition into university. It is therefore important to recognise that within each cohort students’ entering knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes are varied and to ensure that your teaching is as inclusive of all student cohorts as possible.

Strategies that may support diversity include:

- allowing students to participate in self-reflective exercises so they may become aware their learning preferences, personality types, preferred team roles etc;
- development of online quizzes that reinforce important points in their topics that students can complete in their own time and at their own pace;
- including a range of different learning, teaching and assessment approaches and providing students with options to choose which they feel suit them best;
- providing opportunities for students to reflect on their own cultural background; and
- scaffolding academic skills, learning processes and assessments e.g.
  - developing an assessment piece that allows students to produce an annotated bibliography;
  - providing students with feedback on the bibliography and the relevance of the resources they have chosen;
  - developing a second assessment piece that builds on the first and requires students to write an essay plan which includes well written topic sentences; identifies key ideas and is based on the feedback they received in relation to the annotated bibliography;
  - provide detailed feedback on the essay plan that will help the student write their final assignment; and
  - develop a final assessment piece that requires the students to write an essay based on the annotated bibliography and the essay plan which incorporates all the feedback they have received.

See also: www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/diversity.jsp

First Year Curriculum Principle - Design

When designing the first year curriculum attention needs to be paid to ensuring the curriculum is student-focussed and provides a foundation so that further learning may be scaffolded. It should be explicit and relevant forming a coherent, integrated basis for all future learning.

Strategies that may support design include:

- identifying and promoting linkages across first year topics so that students are aware of their integration and relevance to each other;
- enabling presentations from relevant industry representatives, the discipline’s researchers and alumni to take place and that they are discussed within class time;
- introducing students to the concept of Graduate Qualities and discuss any included in your topics with them. Build activities into the curriculum that promote reflection on the Graduate Qualities and how they may be relevant to the student’s career, employability and to the discipline under study; and
- actively encouraging the use of e-learning portfolios.

See also: www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/design.jsp
First Year Curriculum Principle - Engagement

Activities that engage students in innovative and collaborative ways rather than those that are focused more on more traditional lecture and discussion and/or text based approaches have been shown to produce quality learning experiences.

Strategies that may support **engagement** include:

- utilising team-based learning approaches in first year topics. Effective team-based approaches require that:
  - teams are carefully formed and managed;
  - students understand that they are accountable for their own and the team’s success;
  - team assignments are designed to promote learning and team development; and
  - feedback provided to all students is frequent and timely.
- the modelling or role-playing of "professional conversations" by academic staff;
- formal mentoring schemes and Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) schemes that are built into the curriculum;
- assigning academic mentors to all commencing students;
- the provision of dedicated physical and/or virtual spaces for first year students; and
- providing commencing students with a passport that aids in the demonstration of students acquisition of specific skills and proficiencies.


First Year Curriculum Principle - Assessment

A well designed first year curriculum can support a student’s appreciation and understanding of higher education assessment. Effective assessment introduces students to a range of appropriate assessment practices and provides timely, well-articulated and constructive feedback on student progress to both students and other staff. The complexity of assessment may be increased as the student progresses through the program.

Strategies that may support **assessment** include:

- developing a Feedback Strategy and communicating it to students. The strategy should support the students growth by:
  - occurring in a timely fashion so that they may utilise comments in future work;
  - providing insight into errors and misunderstandings;
  - guiding students on how they can improve;
  - including examples to demonstrate good and bad work;
  - being tailored to the individual; etc.
- examples of the standards of work that is required to pass and excel may be made available to students; and
- demonstrating how work is assessed by correcting a piece of writing or mathematical problem in a large class using the track changes function in MS Word.


First Year Curriculum Principle - Evaluation and Monitoring

Mechanisms that monitor student engagement and performance and allow timely intervention in aid of students at risk of not succeeding need to be present in first year curriculum design.

Strategies that may support **evaluation and monitoring** include:

- using attendance sheets so that absent students may be identified and followed up;
- academic staff learning students’ names;
- requiring students to participate in peer mentoring programs;
- maintaining a log of online interactions (through FLO);
- requiring all students enrolled in a course to participate in online tests that identify competence in math, English grammar or other prerequisite knowledge which is followed by face to face support in acquiring proficiency (rather than providing remedial support only after a problem is identified);
- using progress bars;
- noting non-submission of assessment and following up with the student; and
- noting poor performance on early assessment and addressing this, in private, with the student.

## Strategies, recommendations & principles

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Adapted from: Trevor Gale, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Presentation at 1st Year Forum, Flinders University, 11 November 2009
The National Audit Office (UK) (2007) reports that it is important to teach the students that attend our universities, not the students we imagine or hope are attending our universities.

Kift (2008) suggests that in order to address attrition we need to ‘adapt and respond to changing student needs and accommodate known and knowable student diversity, which is writ large in the contemporary massified sector’ (p. 5).

Tinto (2009) argues that student success ‘does not arise by chance’ it requires an ‘intentional, structured, and proactive set of strategies’ that are systematic and carefully aligned to the goal of student success (p. 10).
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Devlin, M, Kift, S, Nelson, K, Smith, L & McKay, J 2012, Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: resources for Australian higher education, Final report, Melbourne, Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching

Kift, S 2009, *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education*, Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program


