More than ticking boxes: digital learning as a meaningful solution to policy and procedure

Key Words

academic progression, academic literacy, digital learning, policy and procedure

Abstract

Academic language and learning staff are frequently tasked with developing meaningful and flexible solutions to accompany new policies and procedures introduced as institutions respond to challenges in higher education. The changing nature of the student population, brought about by the growth in numbers and increased diversity of university cohorts, brings with it one such challenge, that of dealing with a large group of students struggling to progress in their academic studies. This case study comes from a small academic language and learning unit in an Australian metropolitan university. It describes the development of an online module developed in response to the institution's new Academic Progression policy. Under this policy, students failing 50% or more of their units are unable to re-enrol until they have sought academic advice. In addition to work commitments and wellbeing issues, faculty student advisers identify poor academic literacy skills as a key and immediate challenge these students face in order to succeed academically. Faculties predict up to 2000 students will fall into this category, all of whom will require advice and some type of support within a six week period, in order to be allowed to continue their studies. Problematically, this will occur at the beginning of session, a time when the ALL unit is fully committed to supporting transitioning students. The potentially high numbers of at-risk students seeking personalised assistance will put a strain on already struggling academic language and literacy services, making meaningful interventions difficult.   This presentation will showcase the online module "StudyWISE Intensive" and our solutions to the two (sometimes conflicting) considerations governing its design: providing meaningful learning experiences and resources for struggling students; while also satisfying institutional needs for flexibility, trackability and accountability. It will also discuss workflows involved in managing the intervention, such as working with central IT to identify and enrol the cohort, training faculty student advisers in the potentials of the module, and tracking student interaction in order to continually improve the efficacy of the resources.