

ABSTRACT

A new undergraduate first year: a home for ALL?

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Victoria University's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan highlights that we are a university of Opportunity and Success. This has led to a uniquely diverse student cohort compared to other Australian Universities. For example: 52% of VU students come from non-English speaking backgrounds, 57% are above the age of 20 at enrolment and a high percentage are low SES students with ATAR below 70.

The range of data indicate that VU's incoming student cohort is underprepared for tertiary study, that attrition during the first year of study is a major concern and that a significant proportion of VU discontinuations occur at the beginning of a student's first semester.

So, VU has a new approach to curriculum with a sequential rather than parallel delivery of the first-year units of study and a new Learning Hub for academic success, employment preparation and leadership development.

The VU First Year Model adopts several curriculum organisation and pedagogy principles to explicitly build student transition from the previous educational experience to the current. These include student engagement, involvement and belonging, learning design, active and collaborative learning and teaching, assessment for learning, and a coherent, systemic structure. A pivotal factor being excellent educators surrounded by knowledgeable, practical technological and pedagogical specialists.

Whilst acknowledging the value of Kift's (2009) Transition Pedagogy's six principles and Lizzio's (2009) five senses which enhance student success, to be effective these all need to be contextualised and realised with specific student outcomes in mind. They indicate a curriculum designed with the intentional scaffolding and interweaving of content, skills and purposeful application. The philosophy driving VU's new first year is predominately experiential with vertical connections to the later years of study, the discipline, and the personal professional journey; the horizontal connections are the experience of being a first year student at Victoria University.

What does this mean for academic language and learning? Excellent educators are now doing it. Building from our student-centredness to claiming some of the professional development space is one future.

References

- Kift, S 2009, Articulating a transition curriculum to scaffold and to enhance the first year student experience in Australian higher education. Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program.
- Lizzio, A 2011, The Student Lifecycle: An Integrative Framework for Guiding Practice.