The social capital of LSES students: Using student stories to mobilise student success
Dr Christie White

Social capital has been defined in various ways (Bourdieu, 1997; Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 1995) but generally it is associated with the social networks or connections and social structures that people are engaged with, and, has been attributed to social class and subsequently likelihood of success in education (Dika & Singh, 2002). Traditional theories of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (LSES) attest that those cohorts have low levels of social capital (Bourdieu, 1997, 2011). This presentation will challenge this assumption and contribute to the growing body of evidence that LSES students in higher education in fact have well developed social capital (Devlin et al., 2012; Macqueen, 2018). Results of a doctoral study, examining the narratives of LSES students in higher education demonstrate that the students had well-developed skills in seeking out support and social capital which challenges preconceived assumptions about socioeconomic status and social class (White, 2016). It is the student’s self-agency (Karimshah et al., 2013) that, in spite of life’s challenges, enables LSES students to strive for success in higher education and, “their resourcefulness and their social capital aided their ability to navigate the complex and challenging higher education environment” (White, 2016, p.116). This report will share the stories of LSES students and how they mobilised their social capital in order to increase their likelihood of success at university.

References:


Learning outcomes

- Participants will understand the concept of social capital in the context of higher education, the student experience and student success
- Participants will challenge their preconceived assumptions of higher education students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have a revised appreciation of the toolbox that LSES students bring to their learning journey, or alternatively, this presentation will validate their existing understanding of LSES students
- Participants will explore ways to capitalise on LSES students’ social capital in order to achieve ways to connect students with support to increase the students’ likelihood of success in higher education
Dr Christie White is the Executive Director of Student Success and Wellbeing at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) where 32% of the student body are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Her role is focused on achieving strategic outcomes for the University, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to not only access and participate in higher education but succeed as well. Christie’s portfolio oversees a range of support services including counselling, health and health promotion, disability support, career development, welfare support, multi-faith, and scholarships. Her doctoral research developed a theoretical framework for higher education services to understand success factors for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and assist students from such backgrounds to access support during their studies. Christie is also the President of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. (ANZSSA).