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## **Message from the President of ANZSSA**

On behalf of the ANZSSA executive, I would like to congratulate the current and previous editors of JANZSSA on reaching this important milestone in the history of our association: the 50th Edition of JANZSSA. As ever, this edition contains diverse, thought provoking and interesting articles for the reader, it also builds upon a tradition of collegial and professional knowledge sharing and best practice showcase.

When travelling overseas, I am frequently told by fellow Student Affairs or student services professionals that they know of ANZSSA and the work of our members in the local sector because of JANZSSA. This reflects the position of JANZSSA as a globally relevant and respected resource for innovation and knowledge sharing.

Many thanks to all the contributors to JANZSSA over the last 25 years, all the authors, reviewers, conference presenters and student reflection contributors, who have published within the journal and stimulated dialogue and debate. As we have now uploaded all editions since 1995 to the ANZSSA website it is possible to stroll from 1995 to 2017 student affairs and perspectives. It is an interesting journey through the tertiary sector landscape and reflects the many changes in government funding, shifts in understanding of student development, internationalisation, awareness of local indigenous issues (both in Australia and New Zealand as well as our partners in the Pacific and Canada). It also provides an interesting point-in-time snapshot of the evolution of our association.

Many thanks and gratitude to the founding editors of JANZSSA who started this journal as a communication mechanism to our members, firstly Olwen Steel, followed by Dick Dawson. Dr Dawson was succeeded by Dr Jim Elliott who took steerage of the journal from 1995 to 2010, and for whom the growth of JANZSSA is both rewarding and a source of pride. Our current editors since 2010, Dr Cathy Stone and Annie Andrews, strive tirelessly to ensure that the articles within each edition are robust, professionally reviewed and presented, and relevant to modern or emerging discourse. Many thanks also to our assistant-editors, copy-editor and reviewers who bring their expertise to the reviewing, development and presentation of articles.

Congratulations to the whole team, and I look forward to reading the next 50 editions.

Jordi Austin

**President ANZSSA (2013-2017)**

## Editorial

### *Special editorial to recognise the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of JANZSSA*

*Looking back....*

Almost 25 years ago, JANZSSA Issue No. 1 was published in March 1993; with the editorial proudly introducing the “Journal of the Australian New Zealand Student Services Association”. Presumably, the ‘and’ between ‘Australian’ and ‘New Zealand’ must have been added later!

On the publication of this 50<sup>th</sup> issue of JANZSSA, it seems timely to look back at that very first issue, to gain a perspective on where we have travelled over the past 25 years. Below therefore is reproduced the very first editorial, from JANZSSA, Issue No. 1, March 1993.

*For some years now we have been used to the irregular appearance of ANZSSA News in its various forms as a medium of information exchange, ideas and news in Student Services. In 1992, the Executive decided to separate the news, diary entries and gossip from ANZSSA News and publish it separately in ANZSSA Antics so that we could provide a more dependable diary communication to members while the News would be a vehicle for more substantial pieces which are less time-reliant.*

*The Executive has now decided to move to the next step and change the name of the publication to fit this new function. May we then introduce JANZSSA, The Journal of the Australian New Zealand Student Services Association. The intention is that we will move the journal slowly to the status of a fully-fledged professional journal with, eventually, refereed articles and, hopefully, an international reputation for saying important things about the areas of post-secondary student support. In the meantime the Executive will form an ad-hoc Editorial Board which will oversight the development of the journal with the editor, Olwen Steel, who will be delighted to find out what has happened to ANZSSA News whilst she has been overseas in Turkey.*

*This development is in response to the growing maturity of the student services sector in Australian and New Zealand universities and colleges. This maturity can be seen in the increasing levels of sophistication and scholarship that has marked the international conferences that have been held over the past decade or more. The quality of presentations has been increasing over the years and there is now a need for a vehicle for preserving a lot of this material in more substantial form.*

*The change of name will also indicate to university and college administrations the more substantial level of the content of the journal and will send a message that contributions in this area are to be taken at the same value of publications in other academic disciplines and specialties.*

*The Executive hopes that the members will respond to this change by submitting articles and papers for publication. The journal will continue to publish Conference papers, research reports, reports of projects and workshops as well as responses, reviews, discussion papers and letters. It will only work if members decide that this venture is worthwhile and support it with contributions.*

### ***Where we are now...***

The editor at that time, Olwen Steel, as well as the Executive of 1993, would no doubt be delighted that JANZSSA not only has fulfilled its intended aim of becoming a ‘fully-fledged professional journal’ but has continued to grow so successfully. Through the relevance and sophistication of published papers JANZSSA has become a well-recognised online journal, accessible through some of the most prominent international academic journal databases such as SCOPUS and EBSCO. Clearly, members decided that JANZSSA was indeed “worthwhile” and this perception has endured, judging by the excellent contributions over the years. JANZSSA continues to provide a publication option for a steady stream of submissions, both refereed and professional, across a wide spectrum of topics. This 50<sup>th</sup> “Gold” edition of JANZSSA is no exception with a range of excellent papers on diverse topics that are both pertinent and timely.

Amongst the three refereed papers, Roxanne DuVivier and colleagues examine the development of a graduate program within the UK for Student Affairs Professionals, applying competencies derived from the US experience; this is particularly relevant to those of us working within Student Services in Australia and New Zealand, amongst whom there is much current discussion about the desirability of postgraduate training specific to our professional work. Christine Minty-Walker and colleagues provide us with the results of the very first trial in Australia, delivered on a large-scale basis, that provided students with hand-held devices (iPads) to aid their learning. Given the increase in blended learning for on-campus students, and the rising enrolments in fully online degree programs, it is indeed timely to be reminded of the “potential and pitfalls” of technology in a learning environment. The third refereed paper, by Stephanie Black, takes a thorough look at the problems that can be associated with the sedentary lifestyle of many students, and proposes ways in which educational institutions could encourage increased levels of physical activity, hence improving not only the physical but also the mental health of students.

Amongst the six other papers, there are two Best Practice Case Examples: Bradley Kunda discusses the Global Leadership Program within a residential college; while Jonathan Munro and colleagues describe how technology is used to deliver 24/7 support to students via the implementation of an out-of-hours remote service that complements traditional on-campus services. Following these, Lindsey Pointer’s professional paper outlines an example of how a restorative university community can be developed, through the use of proactive measures and restorative justice processes. The second professional paper is by Vivienne Browne and colleagues who provide an extremely useful commentary and overview of the “Under the Radar” Report, published in May by Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, which examines the mental health of Australian university students and makes recommendations for ways that universities could offer system responses to promote student wellbeing, mental health and respond to student mental ill-health.. Next is a report from one of our JANZSSA editors, Cathy Stone, on National Guidelines to improve student outcomes in online learning; a key outcome of a research project undertaken to improve access, participation and success in online higher education, funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) which published the full report in March. The final contribution is a most interesting Conversation Piece by Helen Stallman and colleagues; this is a thought-provoking critique of the use of “trigger warnings” and the implications for student resilience when used in university material to try to protect students from distressing content.

In 2017, JANZSSA continues to honour the original aim established 25 years ago of “*saying important things about the areas of post-secondary student support*“. This purpose continues to be achieved with the tremendous support and written contributions from the ANZSSA membership plus other colleagues, working in post-secondary education in Australia, New Zealand and, in recent times more frequently, from colleagues working in Student Services and Student Affairs internationally. The combined conference of ANZSSA in partnership with ISANA (International Education Association) being held in Brisbane from 5-8 December is another opportunity to hear some excellent presentations and to network with colleagues across the sector. Further information can be found at <http://www.isana-anzssa.com/>. Those presenting at the conference are warmly invited to submit papers by the end of January 2018 for the special conference section of the April 2018 edition of JANZSSA.

We hope you enjoy this 50<sup>th</sup> edition of JANZSSA and wish you all happy reading!

Cathy Stone  
Annie Andrews  
**Co-editors, JANZSSA**

# Survival of the Fittest: Evidence-based Interventions for Physical Inactivity amongst Student Populations

Stephanie C. Black  
Edith Cowan University

## Abstract

*Lack of physical activity is a problem amongst student populations given their large proportion of desk-bound activity. Attrition from physical activity programs is widespread. Attrition is influenced by proximal and distal factors of health behaviour. This literature review provides an overview of the theoretical basis of the need for physical activity. Theories on health behaviour are compared, the most useful behaviour change models for deriving theory-based interventions are determined, and an overview of the most successful intervention techniques according to taxonomy-based meta-studies is provided. The literature indicates that integrated interventions that include multiple evidence-based, theory-driven intervention techniques can be effective for increasing physical activity behaviour in individuals and, consequently, improve health outcomes. Professional delivery and individual tailoring further increase the efficacy of interventions. Opportunities for future research are recommended in the areas of converging behaviour change theories, measurement devices for physical activity, and broadening the evidence base for the maintenance phase of health behaviour change.*

**Keywords:** physical inactivity, attrition from exercise

## Introduction

Throughout most of human history, high levels of physical activity have been required for survival; consequently, the human body is optimised for and thrives under conditions of high physical activity, while a sedentary lifestyle is outside the design parameters of the human body (Booth & Laye, 2010; Devonshire-Gill & Norton, 2013; Eaton & Eaton, 2003). This is salient amongst university student populations which spend considerable time sitting while listening to lectures, reading, writing assignments and studying (Rouse & Biddle, 2010).

Physical inactivity is ranked the fourth highest health risk factor in Australia for premature death and disability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). A range of clinical and epidemiological evidence shows an association between physical inactivity and mental and physical illnesses (Gebel et al., 2015; Stenholm et al., 2016; Voss, Nagamatsu, Liu-Ambrose, & Kramer, 2011). Yet, nearly 60% of Australians over the age of 15 do not achieve sufficient physical activity to reduce this risk factor (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). Moreover, half of Australia's college-aged population does not achieve sufficient physical activity to reduce this risk factor (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, 2016). Projections estimate that a 10% reduction in physical inactivity would produce 2,000 fewer deaths in Australia (Cadilhac et al., 2011). Therefore, the statistical evidence for the risks associated with physical inactivity constitutes a significant incentive to increase physical activity. To increase physical activity in individuals, it is necessary to address the factors that contribute to successful initiation and maintenance of physical activity with effective theory-derived interventions. The aim of this article is, therefore, to identify evidence-based interventions which lead to increased physical activity, with particular regard to student populations. In order to do so, it is first necessary to examine the current literature in relation to the links between physical inactivity and ill-health.

## **Prevalence of physical inactivity**

According to a survey by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) nearly 60% of Australians over the age of 15 do not achieve sufficient physical activity to meet Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (i.e., 150 to 300 minutes of moderate or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both; Department of Health, 2014). University students are also prone to physical inactivity. Transition to university life is a challenging time for students, often leading to increased sedentary behaviour and decreased physical activity (Kwan, Cairney, Faulkner, & Pullenyegeum, 2012). Few current statistics are available regarding physical inactivity levels amongst Australian university students. However, an older study showed that 47% of female and 32% of male college students were insufficiently physically active (Leslie et al., 1999). Furthermore, only half of Australians aged 18 to 39 years (i.e., comprising the three age groups most represented amongst students; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) achieve sufficient physical activity levels for health benefits (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

## **Contribution of physical inactivity to the burden of disease in Australia**

To appreciate how physical inactivity is affecting Australia, determining the prevalence of physical inactivity alone is not sufficient; it is important to consider the burden of disease resulting from physical inactivity. A recent Australian study ranked physical inactivity the fourth highest health risk factor in Australia, contributing 5% to the overall burden of disease and 33% to the total burden from coronary heart disease (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). Scenario analyses to estimate the projected future burden of disease determined that a 10% reduction in physical inactivity in Australia would produce 6,000 fewer cases of disease and 2,000 fewer deaths (Cadilhac et al., 2011). These figures and observations make a compelling case for encouraging increased physical activity in students to offset the possibility of future ill health.

It is noteworthy that the situation is even worse for older populations. In a study undertaken in 2011, it was found that for females aged 45-64, physical inactivity was the second highest risk factor for healthy life years lost, exceeded only by tobacco use. For males aged 45-64, physical inactivity was the third highest risk factor (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016).

In 2016, 34% of all students enrolled in formal study were over the age of 25, and 8.5% were over the age of 45 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This increased proportion of mature age students has implications for campus populations, with mature students at higher risk for healthy life years lost.

## **Association between physical inactivity and specific health conditions**

### **a) Mental health**

Mental health issues amongst student populations are increasing (Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010). Stallman (2010) observed that every fifth Western Australian university student faces mental health issues, with 67.4% experiencing subsyndromal symptoms. According to a recent survey by Headspace and the National Union of Students, around 80% of Australian students reported mental health problems, such as feeling stressed, depressed and/or anxious; two-thirds of students noted high or very high psychological distress over the past 12 months; and over a third disclosed suicidal ideation (Headspace, 2017). A similarly high incidence of suicidal ideation was observed by an international study spanning 12 nations, which reported that 29% of students have contemplated suicide (Eskin, et al., 2016).

Clinical and epidemiological evidence corroborates the existence of a relationship between physical inactivity and mental health conditions (for an overview see Voss et al., 2011). For example, evidence supporting the anti-depressive effect of physical activity has been mounting, with recent meta-analyses of random controlled trials finding strong evidence of a link between physical exercise and a decrease in depression (Josefsson, Lindwall, & Archer, 2014; Schuch et al., 2016; Stubbs et al., 2016). Moreover, biochemical experiments and brain imaging trials support an anti-depressive effect of physical activity; explanatory mechanisms include neuroplasticity and neurotropic factors (Dishman et al., 2006) and augmentation of the kynurenine and serotonin metabolism (Agudelo et al., 2014). In addition, animal studies and human trials have shown improved cognitive function with increased physical activity, and the benefits of exercise for cognitive functions are observable across the whole lifespan from early childhood to old age (Voss et al., 2011), including all age-segments represented amongst students.

### **b) Physical health**

Insufficient physical activity is also considered a risk factor for physical illness (Abu-Omar & Rütten, 2008; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). Several studies have shown that physical inactivity increases the risk of all-cause mortality (Gebel et al., 2015; Rhee, Kim, Park, Li, & Ahn, 2012; Stenholm et al., 2016). Moreover, there is evidence of a relationship between increased physical inactivity and increased risk of obesity (Stenholm et al., 2016), diabetes (Conn et al., 2014; Eaton & Eaton, 2017), cancer (Winzer, Whiteman, Reeves, & Paratz, 2011) and heart disease (Shiroma & Lee, 2010). The evident association of physical inactivity with ill health and increased mortality risk constitutes compelling motivation to encourage an increase in physical activity levels in individuals at any stage of life. This is salient for student populations, given that academic study comprises predominantly sedentary activities (Rouse & Biddle, 2010).

Research has shown that sustainable increase of physical activity can be achieved when physical activity programs are paired with concomitant psychological interventions based on solid theory (Baker, Simpson, Lloyd, Bauman, & Singh, 2011; Greaves et al., 2011). Therefore, the following section discusses the literature in relation to health behaviour change.

## **Theories of health behaviour change**

### **a) Proximal and distal factors**

Factors that influence health behaviour change are usually grouped into proximal and distal factors (Glass & McAtee, 2006; Roux, 2004). Proximal factors are those which directly influence behaviours, such as attitudes and beliefs, whereas distal factors are those which exert an indirect or mediating influence, such as socioeconomic status and the external environment. For example, it has been well established that socioeconomic status can have a substantial influence on health behaviour (see literature review by Hanson & Chen, 2007). However, it is not realistic for a health practitioner to try to change their client's socioeconomic status. Proximal factors are generally more influential than distal factors and present easier intervention targets; therefore, it is considered more practical to concentrate on proximal factors (Webb, Sniehotta, & Michie, 2010).

### **b) Coping and self-regulation**

When reviewing health behaviour theories to elucidate potential intervention targets, it is important to keep in mind that health behaviours are subject to goals and self-regulation. In

this context, goals do not only comprise beneficial health behaviour goals (e.g., “I want to exercise more to improve my heart health”), but also potentially destructive goals that are aimed at short-term problem solving to cope with life stressors (e.g., “I will not exercise today but instead watch television to distract me from the problem I had at university today” adapted from Ingledew & McDonagh, 1998). In order for a client to prioritise beneficial health behaviour goals over potentially destructive coping goals, cognitive and emotional self-regulation is required (Karoly, 2012; McKee & Ntoumanis, 2014).

### c) **Static sociocognitive health behaviour change models**

An extensive number of sociocognitive behaviour change models have been put forward to explain health behaviour. These include static models such as the *health belief model*, which focuses on beliefs as the most proximal predictor of behaviour (Rosenstock, 1966, 1974; Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988); the theories of *reasoned action* and *planned behaviour*, which focus on intention as the most proximal predictor of behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975, 1977; Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and *protection motivation theory* (Rogers, 1975, 1983), which focuses on how a person evaluates potential health threat coping mechanisms.

Interventions based on these models have been shown to be successful in initiating physical activity (De Vivo, Hulbert, Mills, & Uphill, 2016) and maintaining it in the short to medium term (Fjeldsoe, Neuhaus, Winkler, & Eakin, 2011) however, physical activity is seldom fully maintained in the long-term (Van Stralen, De Vries, Mudde, Bolman, & Lechner, 2009).

### d) **Stage models**

In attempting to improve upon the limitations of the static behaviour change models, a number of stage models have been put forward. An example is the *transtheoretical model* (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), which focuses on self-efficacy and perceived outcomes as the most proximal predictors of behavioural change. Interventions based on the *transtheoretical model* are supported by research (see meta-studies by Mastellos, Gunn, Felix, Car, & Majeed, 2014 and Van Stralen et al., 2009). However, Hutchison, Breckon and Johnston (2008) found in a meta-analysis that the majority of interventions based on the *transtheoretical model* failed to accurately represent all dimensions of the model.

### e) **Hybrid models**

To account for the above limitations and the criticism that neither the static nor the stage models successfully bridge the intention-behaviour gap (Sniehotta, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005), updated hybrid models have been conceived that synthesise the preceding models. The *reasoned action approach* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Ajzen, 2010) incorporates elements from both static and stage models and attempts to bridge the intention-behaviour gap by focusing on increasing skills, decreasing environmental barriers and changing salient beliefs (Sniehotta et al., 2005).

The *health action process approach* (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2008) integrates factors that influence *implementation intention* (i.e., distal factors, such as risk perception, and proximal factors, such as beliefs and outcome expectations) with components from the *extended transtheoretical model*, giving more room to account for relapse and recovery in the stages of change. The model also considers barriers to change, resources for change, and the phase-specific roles of self-efficacy during the pre-intentional motivational versus post-intentional volitional stages of change.

The hybrid models are both theoretically comprehensive and successful in generating effective interventions (e.g., action planning, goal-setting, implementation intentions and support self-efficacy; Gaston & Prapavessis, 2014; Hattar, Pal, & Hagger, 2016; Sniehotta et al., 2005).

#### **f) Control theory**

*Control theory* is another behaviour change theory that has been successfully used to inform interventions. *Control theory* is part of the class of *feedback loop models of behaviour change* (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Kanfer & Goldstein, 1975; Kanfer, 1971). The efficacy of *control theory* based interventions (e.g., self-monitoring, Webb et al., 2010) is supported by several meta-studies and literature reviews (Michie & Johnston, 2012; Williams & French, 2011).

#### **Comparing models**

There is tentative consensus that the hybrid models and, to a lesser extent, the stage models are better supported for explaining health behaviour change than the static models (Sniehotta et al., 2005). Moreover, there is evidence in favour of control theory (Michie & Johnston, 2012; Williams & French, 2011). In conclusion, behaviour change models most conducive to the derivation of theory-driven interventions are those that address the client's stage of change, the intention-behaviour gap, and the client's capacity to self-monitor and self-regulate.

#### **Interventions for increasing physical activity**

##### ***Taxonomies of behaviour change interventions***

Given the large number of behaviour change models and interventions derived from these, mapping interventions onto corresponding theories is not trivial. Several taxonomies of behaviour change interventions have been put forward (Abraham & Michie, 2008; Michie et al., 2011; Sussman, Sun, & Dent, 2006). A more recent taxonomy for behaviour change interventions targeting physical inactivity in individuals catalogues 40 intervention techniques (Michie et al., 2011).

##### ***Comparing efficacy of interventions***

Michie, Abraham, Whittington, McAteer, and Gupta (2009) assessed 122 publications using the taxonomy of Abraham and Michie (2008), and observed that interventions that included self-monitoring and another self-regulatory technique were the most efficacious with an effect size nearly double that of any other intervention. Using Sussman et al.'s (2006) taxonomy, Hutchinson and Wilson (2012) assessed 29 studies and found a large effect for interventions incorporating motivational enhancement. In summary, the intervention techniques that have been reported to be the most successful in taxonomy-based meta-studies are self-monitoring, self-regulation, and motivational enhancement.

##### ***Integrated interventions***

In practice, interventions are rarely used in isolation, but rather multiple evidence-based and theory-derived interventions are combined into integrated interventions. There is abundant evidence for the efficacy of integrated interventions for physical inactivity. For example, motivational interviewing includes the efficacious individual techniques of motivational and self-efficacy support, self-monitoring, goal-setting, and treatment planning (Greaves et al., 2011; O'Halloran et al., 2014; Pignataro & James, 2015). Other examples of highly efficacious integrated interventions are counselling (Baker et al., 2011; Greaves et al., 2011),

cognitive behaviour therapy (Brawley, Arbour-Nicitopoulos, & Martin Ginis, 2013), brief interventions (Cunningham, Swanson, Holdsworth, & O'Carroll, 2013) and action and coping planning (Sniehotta, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2006). These interventions are also well-known to be efficacious in many other therapeutic contexts, not just physical inactivity. They are likely to be already part of the portfolio of many student services professionals, requiring little adaptation and enabling the practitioner to target physical inactivity with high efficacy.

### **Modes of intervention delivery**

#### **a) Tailored interventions**

Apart from the type of intervention used, numerous meta-analyses report that individually tailored interventions that are designed and administered by health professionals are more successful than self-help for targeting physical inactivity (Fjeldsoe et al., 2011; Greaves et al., 2011). One random controlled trial came to the opposite conclusion (Kinmonth et al., 2008); however, the researchers noted that the tailored physical activity intervention utilised may have been too complex and confusing compared to the control group, thereby confounding the effects.

#### **b) Frequency and mode of intervention**

Conclusions regarding the influence of frequency and delivery location on the efficacy of interventions are mixed. There is some support that interventions are more effective if they are conducted more frequently (Fjeldsoe et al., 2011; Greaves et al., 2011) and face-to-face (Fjeldsoe et al., 2011). However, some research found mixed evidence for an association between effectiveness and mode of intervention delivery (Greaves et al., 2011), and Davies, Spence, Vandelandotte, Caperchione and Mummery (2012) reported that internet delivery of interventions targeting physical inactivity is also effective.

#### **c) Training and skills**

One of the limitations of most interventions is that it is only effective if the professional performing the intervention possesses good emphatic listening skills and is well trained (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). This places high requirements on the training and supervision of practitioners. To ensure a high standard of intervention delivery, treatment fidelity needs to be monitored. Instruments for measuring treatment fidelity have been developed for several interventions; one example is the Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI) scale (Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Hendrickson, and Miller, 2005).

### **Discussion and recommendations**

The previous sections have reviewed the prevalence of physical inactivity in Australia, especially regarding student populations, the current and projected burden of disease attributable to physical inactivity in Australia, and the evidence for associations between physical activity and various mental and physical health conditions. This information has highlighted the importance of encouraging students to partake in sufficient physical activity. Attrition from physical activity programs can be influenced by proximal and distal factors of health behaviour; and to decrease attrition, *self-regulation* is required to prioritise beneficial health behaviour over destructive coping mechanisms. In comparing the major sociocognitive health behaviour change theories, including static, stage and hybrid models and control theory, the evidence suggests that behaviour change models that address the client's stage of change, the intention-behaviour gap and self-regulation are most useful for deriving theory-based interventions. Self-monitoring, self-regulation and motivational support are the most

successful intervention techniques according to taxonomy-based meta-studies. Quality of delivery is also important, with professionally delivered, individually tailored, frequent interventions the most efficacious.

Therefore, within a university setting, it is likely that students can be encouraged to increase their levels of physical activity through the delivery of integrated interventions that include multiple effective intervention techniques. For example, through university health and counselling services, there are a number of interventions that, when delivered by well-trained professionals, can be effective in encouraging students to increase their levels of physical activity and consequently to improve health outcomes. Such interventions include motivational interviewing, cognitive behaviour therapy, action and coping planning, and so on. Similarly, clubs and societies can promote increased physical activity through a range of interventions that encourage students to set goals, self-monitor, remove barriers to the initiation and maintenance of physical activity, and remain motivated despite temporary lapses. Moreover, teaching personnel can encourage students to build social support networks which may lead to physical activity in an enjoyable social context, whereas university administrators could be advocating for improved funding and support for programs and facilities which encourage greater physical activity amongst students.

## **Limitations and further research**

### ***Unifying behaviour change theories***

As previously shown, various behaviour change models partially overlap, and more research is needed to pare down and unify the overlapping models further (Noar & Zimmerman, 2005; Weinstein & Rothman, 2005). This would allow for more concise mapping of intervention techniques onto theories and better inform the development and selection of interventions.

### ***Measurements***

Another useful avenue for research is that related to the development of reliable measurement devices for physical activity. Accelerometers and pedometers are types of semi-automated trackers that enable easy logging of physical activity, thereby promoting self-monitoring (Choe et al., 2017). Self-monitoring, in turn, as previously shown, has positive impacts on physical activity. Congruent with this reasoning, a meta-study by Bravata et al. (2007) found that pedometer use increases participants' daily step counts. Moreover, Raedeke, Focht, and King (2010) observed that combining a pedometer intervention with cognitive-behavioural strategies increased physical activity levels in undergraduate students even more than pedometer use alone. Additionally, pedometers could be used to physically verify the accuracy of newly developed self-report measures for physical activity intervention studies and replace direct observation and self-reports, thereby increasing the accuracy of the measures (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012).

### ***Long-term maintenance of physical activity***

While much research has focused on pre-implementation, implementation and action, less research has focused on the maintenance stage of physical activity, with only approximately one out of three studies reporting the efficacy of interventions for long-term maintenance of physical activity (Fjeldsoe et al., 2011). More research is required that focuses on long-term maintenance.

## **Conclusion**

Similar to the general Australian population, it is important for the physical and mental health of university students to maintain sufficient physical activity. Students are engaged in much sedentary work and, given the known health risks of physical inactivity, it is important that universities consider the role they can play in encouraging and promoting greater levels of physical activity amongst students, thereby improving health outcomes. University health and counselling services, societies and clubs, teaching personnel and administrators all have their part to play in building a culture of greater physical activity on campus through integrated interventions that promote, support and encourage students to incorporate physical activity as a regular part of their university lives.

## **Acknowledgement**

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**The author may be contacted via**  
stef.black@gmail.com



## **Applying the ACPA/NASPA Competencies in the Development of a Student Affairs Graduate Professional Preparation Course in the UK**

Roxanne DuVivier<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Lee<sup>2</sup>

Adrienne Johnson<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

*This research study investigated the application of the American College Personnel Association/National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (ACPA/NASPA) competencies in the development of a graduate preparation course at a large, multi-campus research university in the UK. Expert practitioner feedback was used to adapt the competency framework and construct a tool for use in a British higher education setting. One hundred and five Student Affairs professionals participated in the resulting mixed methods study. Findings from this study have implication for applying the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies in the development of postgraduate professional preparation courses outside of the continental US.*

**Keywords:** student affairs, professional preparation, competencies in higher education

### **Introduction**

This research study examined the use of the American College Personnel Association/National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (ACPA/NASPA) professional competencies developed and most frequently applied in the United States of America (US) to inform the development of a Student Affairs graduate professional preparation course in the United Kingdom (UK). It sought to examine the relative benefits and challenges of this international application. The researchers developed the quantitative and qualitative methods used, and applied results of these competency measures in building academic courses. The researchers applied social constructivist perspectives that suggest that learners construct knowledge out of their own experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). They sought to capture the learning associated with the process of applying higher education professional standards developed in the US to another cultural setting, a process for which there was no suggested protocol. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How appropriate are the ACPA/NASPA competency categories in describing Student Affairs work in a higher education setting outside of the continental US?
2. For global use, how culturally universal or limiting is the language used in describing the ACPA/NASPA competencies?
3. What benefit, if any, is derived from evaluating prospective students' competency levels before designing professional preparation courses?

In the US, postgraduate Student Affairs courses that focus on both pre-service and in-service professional education of all those who support the student experience, are well established. Those supporting the higher education student experience in the UK, while frequently participating in postgraduate professional development, had no equivalent degree path or

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<sup>1</sup> Roxanne DuVivier, Department of Leadership Studies in Education and Organisations, College of Education and Human Services, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, USA

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Lee, Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education. Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK

<sup>3</sup> Adrienne Johnson, Department of Human Services, College of Education and Human Services, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, USA

award specific to Student Affairs.

UK higher education sectors have undergone unprecedented levels of change and diversification in recent years (Hazelkorn, 2015). Correspondingly, those working to support the student higher education experience have developed and expanded their roles to meet these challenges. At a time when UK universities and colleges place a higher priority than ever on the student experience and student satisfaction, higher education institutions require personnel who command a wide range of skills and knowledge, and are competent in applying their experience in a highly complex and wide-ranging professional environment. Due to both changing demographics and the introduction of a new undergraduate funding system, the UK landscape appears to be progressively aligning with trending US higher education priorities (Universities UK, 2015). There are numerous explanations for these similarities.

It is known that the UK higher education tradition is a hybrid of the historically British collegiate emphasis on the development of character, the European university emphasis on developing intellect combined with US democratic values that emphasise individualism and personal liberties (Fried & Lewis, 2015). Approaches originating in the US have become better known throughout the world as societal globalisation occurs. It is important, however, to recognise that though the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of UK and US higher education are indelibly aligned, the contextual realities that exist in the US may differ somewhat or substantially from those in the UK, making full adoption of US processes ill advised.

### **Literature review**

In the early twentieth century, the US, after a great economic depression and affected by the winds of a second world war, embraced a new sensitisation to the importance of the individual in society. This altered awareness was key to the creation of the landmark document that is considered foundational to the profession of Student Affairs, called the Student Personnel Point of View. This report, written by a group of college presidents representing the American Council on Education (ACE) defined (ACE, 1937) and later refined (ACE, 1949) the profession's philosophical foundations. The issuance of this report created a shift in US higher education priorities by expanding the university's role in developing students in a multifaceted context. It began the practice of aligning university resources to develop students emotionally, physically, socially and spiritually to augment their intellectual growth and improve their capacity for success.

Over the next few decades, many aspects of this expansion continued to evolve. By the middle part of the twentieth century, US students' rights and freedoms on campuses across the nation became integral parts of university policy that were afforded to all students (Joint Statement of Rights and Freedoms, AAUP, 1967). The university's responsibility for student development became a recognised part of its work (Brown, ACPA, 1972) and the manner in which Student Affairs contributes to the learning enterprise was defined and expanded (ACPA, 1996; Keeling, 2004, 2006).

Opportunities for engagement in value-added, out of classroom experiences steadily increased due to research that persuasively connected greater levels of student involvement with increased rates of persistence (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Kuh, 2007; Kinsey, Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 2005; Miller, Tyree, Riegler & Herreid, 2010). These studies provided empirical validation for the work that Student Affairs members of staff perform. Their

findings supported the assertion that the out of classroom learning opportunities most frequently offered by Student Affairs professionals amplify the effects of academic coursework and directly contribute to both degree completion rates and to the production of more well-rounded graduates.

The profession comprises individuals with diverse undergraduate majors, interests, and backgrounds joined by a common interest in providing service and courses to college students. There is evidence to suggest that professional preparation courses strengthen professional functioning of these members of staff by instilling in this otherwise diverse group, a general professional competence that is critical to career success (Delworth, Hanson, & Associates, 1992; Hyman, 1988; Sandeen, 1982; Stamatakos, 1981). In 2010, the Joint ACPA/NASPA Task Force on the Future of Student Affairs formulated an agreed-upon set of guidelines for the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to work in the profession in ten (10) critical practice domains (ACPA/NASPA, 2010).

The task force issued a report that, among other challenges, charged the profession with designing and ensuring high quality professional development courses to ensure continuity of effective practice. It focused attention on growing international knowledge networks and enhancing channels of communication. The report further outlined the relevance of establishing global linkages to support social and economic justice, the preservation of natural resources and in support of perpetuating the fabric of democracy. The competency document was revised and re-issued in 2015 to address changes in practitioner role demands. Both the 2007 ACPA Steering Committee and two subsequent joint national Task Forces contend that the competencies represent broad skills, views and understandings and derive their relevance when they are applied in an institutional context.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants in this mixed methods study were all members of staff in the Student Affairs department at one large, multi-campus UK research university. One hundred and twenty-nine members of the Student Affairs staff were invited to participate in the research study.

The gender make-up consisted of 75% females and 25% males. Ninety percent of the staff identified as members of the Caucasian culture, while 8.5% identified as Black or Minority Ethnic, and 1.5% identified as “Unknown”. Nineteen percent were under age 30, 32% were between 30 and 39 years, 20% were between 40 and 49 years, and 29% were over 50 years.

To avoid any perception that the research had staff evaluation as a purpose, no demographic identifiers were requested. One hundred and five of the 129 members of staff agreed to participate in the study. Data collection took place during a professional development event, or Away Day, where a US competency tool adapted for use in the UK was administered and focus group research conducted.

### ***Theoretical framework***

A mixed methods approach, and way of thinking, guided the social inquiry so the researchers could assess, in multiple ways, the standpoints of participants and what was important to them and most valued by them (Greene, 2008).

The interpretive framework that guided the researchers work was that of Social Constructivism. The researchers subscribed to the ontological beliefs that “multiple realities

are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others” (Creswell, 2013). The researchers were guided by their epistemological beliefs that “reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell, 2013).

### ***Procedure***

This study was bound with a single example of the development of a non-US graduate preparation course in Student Affairs. Methodological triangulation was achieved by using two data sources to ensure a higher degree of accuracy of results (Yin, 2014). The developer of the Master of Arts (MA) course was one of the authors of this article, and while she was involved in the gathering, analysis and use of competency data, she was not involved in the subsequent analysis of process. The second researcher was not involved in the development of the adapted competency instrument, nor data collection and quantitative data reporting, but did participate in qualitative data coding. The second researcher retrospectively examined the process and developed suggestions for future transnational applications. The third researcher analysed the survey’s quantitative data.

The method used in the development of the adaptive instrument was as follows. The rating scale and structure of the US competency tools were maintained but changes were made to the language and tone of the tools to reflect the context of UK Student Affairs. To do this, US versions were shared with the leadership team of the university’s Student Affairs department. In a series of face-to-face meetings, members of the leadership team and the MA Course Leader considered the language of the tools in depth. The ten ACPA/NASPA headings were retained but adapted where necessary to reflect UK Student Affairs culture and practice. For example, the section entitled ‘Student Learning and Development’ was replaced by ‘Student Experience’ as UK student attainment in learning sits more typically with academic departments and Student Experience is a more familiar term for UK Student Affairs staff. Similarly, the section on ‘Law, Policy and Governance’ in the US competency tool was revised to read ‘Policy and the Governing Body’ to better fit the context in which UK Student Affairs staff operate. Each of the competency statements was then considered line by line and, where appropriate, reworded or omitted where not deemed relevant in the UK. Once the Student Affairs leadership team and MA course leader agreed to a draft version of the UK tool, it was disseminated via email to senior representatives from the Association of Managers of Student Affairs in Higher Education (AMOSSHE). Further amendments were made to the language of the tool in light of feedback from AMOSSHE representatives. The tool was then piloted with three UK Student Affairs colleagues. Where meaning and context were unclear, pilot responders were asked to annotate the tool denoting where additional clarity was required. This feedback was then collated and further minor amendments were made to the language and tone of the tool.

The researcher presented the questionnaire to the participants, and instructions for completion were given. Questions about the process were invited and then participants were randomly split into eleven groups and taken by a group facilitator to a classroom. The group facilitators were senior leaders in the university’s Student Affairs department. Forty-five minutes were allocated for the completion of the questionnaire after which the group facilitator collected the questionnaires and placed them in a sealed envelope. A further 45 minutes was allocated for a focus group discussion based on themes and topics for curriculum design, and group facilitators captured the salient points on flip chart paper.

The completed questionnaires and focus group flip chart feedback were collated by a research

assistant. The questionnaire responses were collated individually where the skill levels and gaps were calculated for each participant and then collated. The focus group feedback was transcribed and coded by topic. Topics emerging three times or more were then extracted into a summary table.

The course leader and Student Affairs senior leadership team jointly analysed the quantitative and qualitative data. Themes that emerged from the data were agreed upon, then mapped into courses from which the curriculum was designed.

## Results

### Survey research

Table 1 provides an analysis of the UK relevant competencies measured by the adopted tool.

*Table 1: Summary table of importance and skills*

| <u>Variable</u>               | <u>n</u> | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>t</u> | <u>df</u> | <u>p</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Advising and Helping          | 105      |          | 0.15      | 25.72    | 1         | 0.025    |
| Importance                    |          | 2.94     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 2.72     |           |          |           |          |
| Evaluation and Research       | 105      |          | 0.14      | 25.60    | 1         | 0.024    |
| Importance                    |          | 2.66     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 2.46     |           |          |           |          |
| Equity, Div., and Inclusion   | 105      |          | 0.31      | 12.36    | 1         | 0.051    |
| Importance                    |          | 2.94     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 2.50     |           |          |           |          |
| Ethical Professional Practice | 105      |          | 0.21      | 15.80    | 1         | 0.040*   |
| Importance                    |          | 2.52     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 2.22     |           |          |           |          |
| History, Philosophy, Values   | 105      |          | 0.13      | 21.84    | 1         | 0.029*   |
| Importance                    |          | 2.17     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 1.98     |           |          |           |          |
| Human and Org. Resource       | 105      |          | 0.13      | 20.78    | 1         | 0.030*   |
| Importance                    |          | 2.07     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 1.88     |           |          |           |          |
| Policy and the Gov. Body      | 105      |          | 0.29      | 7.90     | 1         | 0.080    |
| Importance                    |          | 1.87     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 1.45     |           |          |           |          |
| Leadership                    | 105      |          | 0.18      | 14.92    | 1         | 0.042*   |
| Importance                    |          | 2.07     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 1.81     |           |          |           |          |
| Personal Foundations          | 105      |          | 0.23      | 14.45    | 1         | 0.044*   |
| Importance                    |          | 2.55     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 2.22     |           |          |           |          |
| Student Experience            | 105      |          | 0.19      | 11.42    | 1         | 0.056    |
| Importance                    |          | 1.74     |           |          |           |          |
| Skill                         |          | 1.46     |           |          |           |          |

\* p<.05.

A significant difference between perceived importance of a competency and acquired skill levels was found in seven of the ten areas of professional competence. Significance was not found in the categories of Equity Diversity and Inclusion, Policy and the Governing Body, and Student Experience.

However, significant differences were found between importance and skills for the following seven competencies: Advising and Helping, Evaluation and Research, Ethical Professional Practice, History, Philosophy and Values, Human and Organisational Resources, Leadership, and Personal Foundations.

### ***Focus group research***

One hundred and five subjects were divided into 11 focus groups that were conducted immediately following the completion of the competency tool. Participants were asked to discuss and record answers to the following question: “If you were designing the curriculum for the new course, what are the five most important topics you would include?”

It is relevant to note that participants had benefit of considering factors recently introduced in the competency tool. Topics that were raised a minimum of three times in the focus group feedback data were determined to have been of importance to the respondents. The topics that emerged surrounded the student experience, student engagement, advising and helping, reflection, ethical professional practice, philosophy and values, practical experience, communication and interactions, rights and responsibility – boundaries in support, organisational behaviour, leadership, contemporary politics re: HE (including comparisons with EU and international) funding (current and changes), interpreting and using collected data to influence policy making, psychology of institutions, models/theories of student affairs, the role of student affairs within the university as a whole.

Several key respondent themes emerged from analysis of the qualitative, focus group data. First, it appeared that the participants, based on their commentary, did not seem used to seeing Student Affairs as a distinct discipline. While respondents recognised that Student Affairs staff comprise a sector of the higher education community, the notion that they are part of a larger and distinct professional discipline for which unique education is required, was a new concept.

Second, a distinction exists in UK higher education circles between academic and support roles. The competency questionnaire blurred the distinctions between what is viewed as academic work with the functions of student support, leaving the respondents to view the tool as lacking relevance to the UK Student Affairs landscape.

Third, the competency tool was viewed by some as evaluative and reflective and lacking practical application. One respondent stated, “Practical experience is vital and should make up a large part of the course”. Another added, “Applicable strategies – don’t lose sight of practical application”; while another remarked, “Doesn’t make clear how the tool is relevant to our specific roles in Student Services”.

Fourth, according to respondents, performing positively in all the competency categories was seen as predominantly relevant for those aspiring to managerial roles in student affairs and not as relevant to the working practitioner. Compared to the US, there is a different consciousness of organisational hierarchy and its implication for role autonomy and position power in the UK. In the US context that is central to both the original and UK adapted

competency documents, management and staff responsibilities are not as discretely defined. In the UK context, there is a clear distinction between management work and responsibilities held by staff. One participant described the competencies as, “More aimed at management”. Another stated, “There’s a vast difference between jobs and different levels of hierarchy”. Another described the competencies as, “Too management focused, not grass roots”, while one expressed this view, “If you aspire to management roles we agree that all areas would apply although it’s difficult to apply to practitioners/teams with different roles and responsibilities”.

UK institutions of higher education hire their employees into positions outlined in the university’s job families guide. It is well understood that only administrators perform work classified as management. Thus, the administrative work that US Student Affairs practitioners perform is neither equivalent nor relevant for UK practice.

A fifth theme emerged surrounding the role national rankings play in UK university priorities which related to Student Affairs. The National Student Survey in the UK ranks institutions according to student satisfaction levels. This fostered a heightened awareness of the role that student affairs staff play in the ranking of their universities. Numerous respondents addressed the importance of the impact of Student Affairs work on university rankings. One respondent said, “Bring the research back to student experience”. Another suggested, “Learn/develop influencing skills – benefits of research can be applied to student experience directly”. Yet another expressed concern over the lack of connection to UK mandates by saying “Student experience was lacking (could be more comprehensive)”.

As part of a sixth theme, participants expressed consistent interest in more clearly mapping Student Affairs competencies to UK higher education standards and regulations. They wanted to see greater connection between Student Affairs job skills, education and training and employment expectations in the UK context. They offered thoughts on how this might be achieved: one participant suggested “More UK policy and governing body references”, while another stated, “Include matrix standards and Quality Assurance guidelines”.

A seventh theme emerged regarding lack of specific reference to UK job titles. This observation caused participants to view the document as omitting components of student affairs departments in the UK. Based on responses it would further appear that participants identified strongly with divisional or functional units and the services they perform but did not see themselves as part of a broader profession. In the words of one respondent, there are “Vast differences between jobs and different levels of hierarchy”. Another expressed concern with functional relevance by saying, “Depends on your role within student services”.

An eighth theme emerged relevant to the cultural appropriateness of using US platforms, concepts and tools in the UK context. Participants frequently commented on the importance of using culturally relevant language and terminology in the competency investigation. Many participants chose to comment on language that described student affairs work. One participant described the tool as “Very American”, while another described it as “Clunky/wordy”. Another suggested need for revision by saying, “More tailoring?” One respondent preferred the term “‘Relevance’ level rather than ‘importance’”, while another broadly suggested, “Language terminology could be made more relevant (‘intermediate/advance’)”.

With regard to the proposal of developing a UK tailored course to award a Master’s degree in Student Affairs, comments made were overwhelmingly positive. One participant said a

degree path, “Enables staff to gain professional recognition”. Another described the course as a, “Stepping stone needed for staff without a degree”. One respondent expressed this view, “Good idea for development. Allows education profession without teaching”. Another described the proposed MA as an, “Excellent chance to undertake a research project related to job role and to the benefit of the department”, while another simply stated, “Good idea!! (about time)”.

Participants were surveyed to determine their interests in the MA Student Affairs in Higher Education course. Results of this quantitative inquiry showed that 14% of respondents intended to immediately enrol in a planned fall start, if offered, and an additional 35% planned to enrol in the next or subsequent September. Only 19 respondents without an MA and not currently studying in another MA course reported that they did not wish to undertake the proposed postgraduate study at all.

### ***Application of competency measures to curriculum building***

While US curriculum resources and the US professional competency tool influenced the development of this course, the team recognised crucial differences between the US MA in Student Affairs in Higher Education courses and those of other UK MA courses. Master’s degree courses in the US emphasise in-depth, pre-service professional preparation and training, as the MA or MEd (Master of Education) degree is an entry-level requirement for most Student Affairs positions. Predominantly, US colleges and universities recruit recent college graduates with relevant undergraduate experience in student support, aspiring to work in the field of Student Affairs.

In contrast, UK Masters’ courses in education tend to recruit experienced education practitioners seeking professional development. UK Masters’ courses are based on the philosophy that knowledge can be created in practice; that dialogue promotes learning and that personal and professional reflection is a key skill in developing practitioner improvement. The UK Quality Assurance Agency benchmarks (QAA, 2008; 2012) for Masters’ degrees (level seven) suggest participants should gain: A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship; originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline; conceptual understanding that enables the student to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the subject area to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, propose new hypotheses.

These QAA benchmark statements influenced the course aims and learning outcomes, as did university generic learning outcomes for level seven. The course was constructed to allow participants to develop as independent, autonomous and critical researchers within a diverse and flexible teaching and learning environment to suit those employed in higher education. The course was designed to encourage participants to be fully involved in the wider postgraduate research community in education. This was considered particularly important to foster writing for publication so that UK Student Affairs practitioners develop the skills required to contribute to a body of literature that, to date is almost exclusively dominated by the USA.

The course presented a learning experience that created, developed and refined professional knowledge and skills for Student Affairs practitioners through: models of reflective practice, the interrogation of theoretical perspectives, peer learning in communities of practice and the use of existing and emergent technologies. The MA Student Affairs in Higher Education was based around four core principles: continuing professional development, research, progression routes, and internationalisation.

Data derived from the competency tool and from the subsequent focus group activity was used to construct the design and content of the UK MA Student Affairs in Higher Education curriculum. Competencies valued by and important to participants were identified across the course content.

The full-time course began with Key Issues and Themes in Higher Education Student Affairs that relates to the History, Philosophy and Values competency. This course included a broad overview of the issues and themes relevant to all those who support the student experience in UK universities. These included but were not limited to: the nature of higher education institutions; historical and social perspectives in higher education and Student Affairs; advising and supporting students; equality, inclusion and diversity; assessment of students; funding in higher education; and career development and employability.

National and International Perspectives in Higher Education Student Affairs included international Student Affairs practices, policies and perspectives and compared these to the UK or, for international participants, those of their own home country. The course developed competencies in Advising and Helping, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Policy and the Governing Body. Students evaluated theoretical explanations and ideological perspectives relating to higher education including, the role of the state, social and cultural capital and educational change. The impact of these factors on the student experience was also critically evaluated in depth.

After two modules rich in theory and literature relating to Student Affairs, participants joined their peers from other areas of postgraduate education in the research methods module, Investigating Education through Research. This module related directly to the Evaluation and Research Skill interests of research participants and provided the skills required to plan and design research for their postgraduate dissertation.

The Professional Enquiry in Education module required participants to apply the theory and literature acquired in the initial two modules to reflect on their own practice in a work setting. This module related to both the Ethical Professional Practice competency and participants' interest in enhancing their personal foundations for professional practice. This module offered the opportunity for participants to undertake a three-week US-based study visit. During this placement, participants completed a research project and shared their findings with US colleagues. The final presentation was recorded and formed part of the summative assessment, alongside a reflective commentary on the study visit experience.

The course concluded with a Postgraduate Major Project in which participants were invited to choose a topic linked to Student Affairs to explore in depth through a 14,000-word dissertation. Participants worked with a supervisor with expertise in the chosen field to complete the project. This module was designed as a capstone experience where synthesis of professional learning is expected and competencies of highest priority to Student Affairs work in the UK were applied.

## Discussion

This research suggests that the ACPA/NASPA competency categories have applicability for describing Student Affairs work outside of the continental US, but also have limitations.

Using the adapted competency tool and conducting focus group research around the application of Student Affairs competencies informed the research inquiry in several ways. First it was noted that seven of the ten UK competencies showed significant differences between participant importance and current skill. This demonstrated both the value of the tool in examining participant views and skills and the gap that exists in professional training. Participant free text comments affirmed the relevance of the competencies in the UK context and pinpointed the need for customisation. Discussing the competencies raised staff understanding of the importance of possessing specific skills to serve students effectively. Asking participating staff to self-identify the skills they possess by category while considering the work-related importance of these skills was a valuable exercise that generated interest in new skill building.

It is further relevant to note that though many competencies were generalisable from the US context to that of the UK, there were also areas that were not contextually relevant along with areas that were important in UK Student Affairs work and missing from the US Student Affairs competency discussion.

Two competency categories, History, Philosophy and Values, and Law, Policy and Governance were perceived to lack cross-cultural relevance. Respondents saw the History, Philosophy and Values as a significant skill gap category but noted that it is UK, not US, history and ideals that have professional relevance. While no significant difference in importance vs skills was found, respondents free text comments suggested they had interest in learning about UK Laws, Policies and Governing Bodies. They welcomed the opportunity to gain a better understanding of UK higher education in terms of political parties, immigration and the European Union. They expressed concern over the rapidly changing nature of Student Affairs in the current UK political climate along with interest in staying abreast of the many changes that directly impact their student-facing professional practice.

It is not surprising that, given the nature of the changing landscape in UK higher education, that Policy and Governing Body was an area in which survey respondents had the least amount of confidence in their present skill levels. They expressed interest in expanding knowledge and developing skills, in accordance with the priorities of university management and governing bodies.

As the UK research university had a longstanding commitment to attracting students from Widening Participation backgrounds, it is not surprising that there was no significant difference between importance and skill on the competency tool. In both their estimation of acquired skills and through their free text comments, respondents expressed confidence in their ability to deliver quality service from an inclusive social lens. They suggested that this competency be recast to address UK standards and regulations, matrix standards and quality assurance, legal necessities under Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and the National Student Survey (NSS). They further indicated in the free text comments that the instrument did not adequately address their responsibilities towards ensuring the inclusion of disabled students. They reported interest in seeing the current descriptions of equity, diversity and inclusion competencies both expanded and enhanced. While it was affirming to see strong skills in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion competencies, and no significant difference between

importance and skill, it raised a question as to whether the competencies, as articulated, presented adequate room for UK staff growth and development.

While participants noted a significant importance vs skills gap in Evaluation and Research, they also remarked that in the UK context, there is no tradition of research in formal professional practice in Student Affairs. While they recognised the value proposition and knew they lacked skills, they saw the emphasis on research competencies as discrepant with practitioner role demands and UK requirements for time spent on student-facing service delivery.

Lastly, an important difference in US and UK Student Affairs work was illuminated by and seen throughout these research activities. The US competency categorisation system was built for application in the US. In a US context, Student Affairs duties progress to management application. Management work, however, is distinctly different from Student Affairs work in the UK context. Job duties in the UK are highly specific by job classification and management responsibilities are outside of the student affairs remit, or work duties.

Fluidity of role demands is commonplace and expected in Student Affairs work as performed in the US. There is no distinction between staff and management in either the 2010 or 2015 versions of the articulated competencies as the distinction has little relevance in US-based work. However, the difference is clear and pronounced in the UK context, where there is no overlap of staff and administrative duties. Thus, a more dichotomised articulation of tasks and roles demands is needed for the ACPA/NASPA competencies to be seen as relevant for application in the UK cultural context.

In examining the language used in the competency document in this non-US application, the researchers found that numerous terms in the US were understood differently in the UK causing some degree of resistance to embrace the ACPA/NASPA competency document, even after adaptation.

Finally, the researchers saw benefit in evaluating prospective students' competency levels before designing graduate preparation courses. Though the MA course's structure was bound by a pre-existing Master's Level framework, the competency areas of greatest value to UK Student Affairs work guided the selection of the key themes for the MA curriculum.

### **Limitations and strengths of the study**

A mixed methods paradigm was chosen for this research inquiry. This framework provided the researchers with quantitative and qualitative results by which to view applicability of US Student Affairs standards to UK Student Affairs work. Once applicability and limitations were demonstrated, it provided an objective and subjective framework for understanding respondent priorities. Though the researchers understood the contextual necessity of absolute elimination of identifiers, the approach removed the researcher's capacity to understand within group differences. It is relevant to note that differences in the use of language may have impacted understanding, intention and responses patterns. The mixed methods approach made the research process more involved, and, thus, more time consuming for the researchers. Having two researchers involved in this study gave objectivity to the process and reduced research bias. Including a qualitative component in the form of focus group research also reduced research bias and focus group research helped to overcome any limitations posed by the quantitative measures used. Themes that emerged from the qualitative inquiry provided the researchers with a deeper understanding of the results obtained by

administration of the adapted tool. This was especially important as the new tool was administered in a cultural context that was different from the one for which it was originally developed. The convergence of themes that arose from this mixed methods inquiry strengthened the researchers' confidence in the study's findings.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This research supports the notion that the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies have applicability outside of the continental US for development of graduate preparation courses. They help shed light on areas of greatest importance for practitioner professional development and directly impact curriculum design. When the ACPA/NASPA competencies are applied to other non-US settings, the scope of Student Affairs staff versus administrative responsibilities may need to be more concisely defined.

Since the study's conclusion, ACPA and NASPA issued a 2015 competency structure and assessment rubrics (ACPA/NASPA, 2015) and these are now available as frameworks to apply and adapt. This research suggests that professional organisations providing guidance to domestic Student Affairs practitioners may be well served to consider tailoring US frameworks for local use. Customisation may increase the relevance of applying an articulated competency structure to staff training and education. It may also serve to overcome any perceptions of paternalism or resistance to embracing a framework that wholly or partially is perceived to lack cultural relevance. Findings from this research suggest that use of language that is culturally clear matters to working professionals while the inclusion of terminology that appears foreign contributes to confusion or possibly resistance.

These research findings should foster dialogue about the nature of student affairs work around the globe and highlight the need for cultural sensitivity in both the definitions used to describe student affairs work, and the competencies needed to perform it. It is appropriate that these definitions should evolve at the national, regional, or local level, around considerations of vision, mission, and governance effecting service to students. It is hoped that this research will spark conversation in professional circles around the emergence of the student affairs profession in an expanding global higher education community, and generate ideas relative to culturally appropriate, domestically determined, student centered professional practice.

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**The authors may be contacted via**  
Roxanne.DuVivier@wright.edu

## **Appendix**

### **Student Affairs Competency Tool**

This survey should be anonymous, so please don't put your name on the form. Try and answer each section as honestly as you can. In particular, don't be too modest about your skills.

1. In column A: Please rate your current skill level for each competency using the scale from 1-4.
2. In column B: Please rate the level to which each competency is important to your current role using the scale 1-4.
3. Complete the whole survey and then, when each section is complete, calculate your total score for each column.
4. Next, calculate your average skill score and average importance score for each section by dividing your total score by the number of questions.
5. If you get time, please enter your average skill level and average importance level for each section on the summary page at the end of the survey.
6. To get an idea of whether your current skills match those required of your role, subtract the importance level from the skill level to calculate your gap score.

A + gap score may mean that your skill level exceeds that required in your role

A – gap score could help you determine future professional development activities

### Student Affairs Competency Tool

In column A: Please rate your current skill level for each competency using the scale from 1-4.

In column B: Please rate the level to which each competency is important to your current role using the scale from 1-4.

| A  | Competency   | B                     |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| Skill Level  |  | Importance Level      |
| 1 = Needs Work   |  | 1 = Not Important     |
| 2 = Satisfactory   |  | 2= Somewhat Important |
| 3= Good  |  | 3= Very Important     |
| 4 = Excellent  | 4 = Essential  |                       |
| <b>Advising and Helping</b>  |  |                       |
| <b>The Advising and Helping competency area addresses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to providing advice, support, direction, feedback and guidance to individuals and groups.</b> |  |                       |
|  | 1. Exhibit active listening skills (e.g., appropriately establishing interpersonal contact, paraphrasing, perception checking, summarising, questioning, encouraging, avoid interrupting, clarifying). |                       |
|  | 2. Establish a rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others.  |                       |
|  | 3. Facilitate reflection to help others make meaning from experience.  |                       |
|  | 4. Pursue multiple objectives in conversations with students.  |                       |
|  | 5. Facilitate problem-solving.   |                       |
|  | 6. Promote individual decision-making and goal-setting.  |                       |
|  | 7. Challenge and encourage students and colleagues effectively.  |                       |
|  | 8. Know and use referral sources (e.g., other offices, outside agencies, knowledge sources), and exhibit referral skills in seeking expert assistance.   |                       |
|  | 9. Identify when and with whom to implement appropriate crisis management and intervention responses.  |                       |

|  |  |                      |
|--|--|----------------------|
|  | 10. Actively seek out opportunities to expand your own knowledge and skills in helping students with specific concerns and as well as helping specific populations within the education environment. |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>10</u></b>                                    | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |  | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Evaluation and Research</b><br><b>The Evaluation and Research competency area focuses on the ability to use information to use and manage processes and the results obtained from them.</b> |  |                      |
|  | 1. Effectively interpret, and use results of evaluation and research reports and studies, including professional literature.   |                      |
|  | 2. Facilitate appropriate data collection for Student Services-wide evaluations using up-to-date technology and methods.   |                      |
|  | 3. Assess the reliability of information and consider the way that it can be applied in your work setting.   |                      |
|  | 4. Explain the necessity to follow university and Student Services procedures and policies with regard to evaluation and other research activities.  |                      |
|  | 5. Identify the sensitivity of raw and partially processed data, handling them with appropriate confidentiality and in line with university policies.  |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>5</u></b>                                     | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |  | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |  |                      |

| <b>Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion</b><br><b>The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) competency area includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to create learning environments that are enriched with diverse views and people. It is also designed to create a university ethos that accepts and celebrates differences among people.</b> |  |                      |
|---|--|----------------------|
|   | 1. Identify the contributions of diverse people within and to the university environment.  |                      |
|   | 2. Apply cultural knowledge to specific and relevant issues on campus.   |                      |
|   | 3. Facilitate dialogue effectively among different sorts of audiences.   |                      |
|   | 4. Interact with diverse individuals, and implement activities and services that reflect an understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences.  |                      |
|   | 5. Recognise the diverse identities possessed by an individual and the ways in which they intersect.   |                      |
|   | 6. Recognise social systems and their influence on people of diverse backgrounds.  |                      |
|   | 7. Articulate an understanding of social justice and the role of higher education, the university, Student Services, and the individual, in furthering its goals.  |                      |
|   | 8. Design culturally relevant and inclusive activities, services, policies, and practices.   |                      |
|   | 9. Demonstrate fair treatment to all individuals and change aspects of the environment that do not promote fair treatment.   |                      |
|   | 10. Identify the ways in which global perspectives impact on university learning.  |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>  | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>10</u></b>  | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|   |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>  |  | <b>Average Score</b> |
|   |  |                      |
| <b>Ethical Professional Practice</b><br><b>The Ethical Professional Practice competency area relates to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand and apply ethical standards to all aspects of your professional practice.</b>   |  |                      |
|   | 1. Identify ethical issues in the course of your current role.   |                      |
|   | 2. Describe the ethical principles of any professional associations directly relevant to your working context.   |                      |
|   | 3. Explain how you apply the ethical principles of Student Services, particularly in relationships with students and colleagues, in the use of technology and sustainable practices, in professional settings and meetings, and in global relationships. |                      |
|   | 4. Assist students in ethical decision-making and make referrals to more experienced professionals when appropriate.   |                      |

|  |   |                      |
|--|---|----------------------|
|  | 5. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of beliefs and values in personal integrity and professional ethical practices.                                       |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>5</u></b>  | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |   |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |   | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |   |                      |
| <b>History, Philosophy, and Values</b><br><b>The History, Philosophy, and Values competency area involves knowledge, skills, and attitudes that connect the history, philosophy, and values of the Student Services profession and your own professional practice.</b> |   |                      |
|  | 1. Describe the historical contexts of higher education and Student Services  |                      |
|  | 2. Describe the various philosophies that define Student Services   |                      |
|  | 3. Demonstrate empathy and compassion for student needs.  |                      |
|  | 4. Describe the roles of Student Services in higher education.  |                      |
|  | 5. Articulate the history of the inclusion and exclusion of people with a variety of identities in higher education.  |                      |
|  | 6. Explain the role and responsibilities of the Student Services professional associations.   |                      |
|  | 7. Explain the purpose and use of publications that incorporate the philosophy and values of Student Services.  |                      |
|  | 8. Explain the public role and societal benefits of Student Services and of higher education generally.   |                      |
|  | 9. Model the principles of the Student Services profession and communicate the expectation of the same from colleagues and supervisees.                           |                      |
|  | 10. Explain how the values of the profession contribute to sustainable practices.   |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>10</u></b> | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |   |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |   | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |   |                      |

| <p align="center"><b>Human and Organisational Resources</b></p> <p align="center"><b>The Human and Organisational Resource competency area includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes used in the selection, supervision, motivation, and formal evaluation of staff, and the effective application of strategies and techniques associated with financial resources, facilities management, technology, risk management and sustainable resources.</b></p> |  |                      |
|--|--|----------------------|
|  | 1. Demonstrate familiarity with the basic principles of supervision and understand the application of supervision techniques.                          |                      |
|  | 2. Explain how job descriptions are designed and know how they support the overall staffing patterns in higher education.                              |                      |
|  | 3. Design a professional development plan that assesses personal strengths and weaknesses, and establishes actions for fostering areas of development. |                      |
|  | 4. Apply introductory motivational techniques with students, staff and others.   |                      |
|  | 5. Describe the basic premises that underlie conflict in organisational and student life and the principles of conflict resolution in these settings.  |                      |
|  | 6. Effectively and appropriately use facilities management procedures to run an activity.  |                      |
|  | 7. Articulate basic accounting techniques for budgeting, monitoring and processing expenditures.   |                      |
|  | 8. Demonstrate the effective use of resources (i.e., financial, human, material).  |                      |
|  | 9. Describe environmentally sensitive issues and explain how your work can incorporate elements of sustainability.                                     |                      |
|  | 10. Develop and disseminate agendas for meetings.  |                      |
|  | 11. Communicate with others effectively and in an appropriate way to the situation in both one-to-one and small group settings.                        |                      |
|  | 12. Describe campus protocols for responding to significant incidents.   |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   |  | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b>  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   | <b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>12</u></b>   | <b>Average Score</b> |

| <b>Policy and the Governing Body</b><br><b>The Policy and Governing Body competency area includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes relating to policy development processes, the work of the university governing body and its impact on your professional practice.</b> |   |                      |
|--|---|----------------------|
|  | 1. Describe how policies are developed at Student Services, university, and national level.   |                      |
|  | 2. Describe the public debates surrounding the major policy issues in higher education, including access, affordability, student experience, and quality.   |                      |
|  | 3. Describe the role of the governing body at the university, and outline the way in which it impacts on staff and students.  |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>3</u></b>  | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |   |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |   | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |   |                      |
| <b>Leadership</b><br><b>The Leadership competency area addresses the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of you in your role, both in an individual capacity and working with others to plan and effect change, and respond to internal and external issues.</b>        |   |                      |
|  | 1. Identify your strengths and areas for development as a leader and seek opportunities to develop your leadership skills.  |                      |
|  | 2. Identify the principles of leadership and leadership styles that include but are not limited to symbolic, expert, relational, and inspirational.   |                      |
|  | 3. Identify the fundamentals of teamwork and teambuilding in the context of your current role.  |                      |
|  | 4. Understand campus cultures (e.g. academic cultures, student cultures) and collaborative relationships, applying that understanding to your role.   |                      |
|  | 5. Articulate the vision and mission of Student Services at Anglia Ruskin University.   |                      |
|  | 6. Identify university traditions, and organisational structures (e.g., networks, governing groups, policies, goals, agendas and resource allocation processes) and how they influence others to act in the organisation. |                      |
|  | 7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of different types of decision-making processes (e.g. consensus, majority vote, and decision by authority).   |                      |
|  | 8. Think critically and creatively, and imagine possibilities for solutions that do not currently exist or are not apparent.  |                      |

|  |  |                      |
|--|--|----------------------|
|  | 9. Identify and then effectively consult with key stakeholders to make informed decisions.   |                      |
|  | 10. Explain the impact of decisions on diverse groups of people.   |                      |
|  | 11. Explain and justify decision making to all interested parties.   |                      |
|  | 12. Identify and introduce conversations on potential issues through appropriate channels within the university.   |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>12</u></b>      | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |  | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Personal Foundations</b><br><b>The Personal Foundations competency area involves the knowledge, skills and attitudes to maintain emotional, physical, social, environmental and relational wellness; be self-directed and self-reflective; be comfortable with ambiguity; be aware of your own areas of strength and growth; have a passion for work; and remain curious.</b> |  |                      |
|  | 1. Identify your primary work responsibilities and, with appropriate ongoing feedback, develop a realistic self-appraisal of your strengths and areas for development. |                      |
|  | 2. Describe the importance of your professional and personal life, and recognise the intersection of each.   |                      |
|  | 3. Recognise and articulate healthy habits for work-life balance.  |                      |
|  | 4. Articulate meaningful goals in your professional role.  |                      |
|  | 5. Recognise the importance of reflection in personal and professional development.  |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>5</u></b>       | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |  | <b>Average Score</b> |

| <b>Student Experience</b>  |  |                      |
|--|--|----------------------|
| <b>The Student Experience competency area addresses the principles of student development and learning. This includes the ability to understand the principles of student development and learning in Student Services practice, as well as understanding teaching and training theory and practice.</b> |  |                      |
|  | 1. Articulate your own developmental journey and identify your own informal theories of student development and learning to enhance your work with students.   |                      |
|  | 2. Articulate how differences of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and religious belief can influence student development in higher education. |                      |
|  | 3. Identify and construct learning outcomes for both daily practice as well as teaching and training activities.   |                      |
|  | 4. Assess teaching, learning and training and incorporate the results of this into your professional practice.   |                      |
| <b>Total Score</b>   | <b>TOTAL SCORE: Please add up the total for each column</b><br><b>AVERAGE SCORE: To calculate your average score, please divide your total score by <u>4</u></b>                                       | <b>Total Score</b>   |
|  |  |                      |
| <b>Average Score</b>   |  | <b>Average Score</b> |
|  |  |                      |
|  |  |                      |

### Competencies Summary Page

Using only your average scores, please enter your average skill level and average importance level for each section in the boxes below.

To get an idea of whether your current skills match those required of your role, you can subtract the importance level from the skill level to calculate your gap score.

**A + Gap score may mean that your skill level exceeds that required in your role**

**A – Gap score could help you determine future professional development activities**

Finally, in order help me understand the likely market for this course; please tick below to indicate your current position:

| Advising and Helping |                  |           |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level          | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                      |                  |           |

| Evaluation and Research |                  |           |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level             | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                         |                  |           |

| Equity, Diversity and Inclusion |                  |           |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level                     | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                                 |                  |           |

| Ethical Professional Practice |                  |           |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level                   | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                               |                  |           |

| History, Philosophy and Values |                  |           |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level                    | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                                |                  |           |

| Human and Organisational Resources |                  |           |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level                        | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                                    |                  |           |

| Policy and the Governing Body |                  |           |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level                   | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                               |                  |           |

| Leadership  |                  |           |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|             |                  |           |

| Personal Foundations |                  |           |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level          | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                      |                  |           |

| Student Experience |                  |           |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Skill Level        | Importance Level | Gap Score |
|                    |                  |           |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>I am interested in applying for the MA Student Affairs in Higher Education from September 2015</b>       |  |
| <b>I am interested in applying for the MA Student Affairs in Higher Education within the next 2-3 years</b> |  |
| <b>I am currently undertaking other postgraduate study or plan to commence this in the near future</b>      |  |
| <b>I am not interested in postgraduate study at the moment</b>  |  |
| <b>I already have a Master's degree</b>   |  |

*Thank-you very much for your help.*

## Unleashing the Potential and Pitfalls of the iPad on Undergraduate Nursing Students in Tertiary Education

Christine Minty-Walker

Nathan J. Wilson

Lucie Ramjan

Paul Glew

School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Western Sydney University

### Abstract

*The proliferation in the use of technological devices in tertiary education is rapidly evolving. Universities are adopting strategies that provide a more flexible and accessible learning and teaching environment. The introduction of iPads formed part of one large multi-campus Australian University's strategy to engage students learning with a mobile device, yet until now there has been no evaluation or research about this strategy. We used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experience of undergraduate nursing students when using the iPad. Findings revealed the participants found the iPad supportive in their studies within a blended learning environment. However, this experience was challenged by limitations as the participants adapted to using this Apple brand mobile device. A foundation of training and support was not provided; hence the capabilities of the iPad were not used to its full potential. This research supported current literature, however also illuminated recommendations for future research. The importance of providing a foundation of preliminary support when implementing a mobile device into a tertiary setting is imperative. This research is the first to explore the lived experience of undergraduate nursing students when using the iPad for tertiary education.*

**Keywords:** iPad, tertiary education, e-learning, blended learning, nursing students.

### Introduction

Tertiary education is continuing to refine and develop strategies that incorporate existing and emerging technologies to assist students with learning. At the forefront of this technological transformation are mobile devices. The incorporation of mobile devices, such as the Apple iPad, into tertiary education is providing a learning experience that enables ubiquitous learning. That is, the ability for learning to occur anywhere, anytime – factors central to the world of mobile learning (m-learning) (Peng, Su, Chou & Tsai, 2009). Since the iPad was first released in April 2010 (Nguyen, Barton, & Nguyen, 2015), it has been one of the largest selling mobile devices (Bansavich & Yoshioka, 2011). The iPad, along with other mobile devices, enables m-learning which facilitates the acquisition of knowledge without the constraints of fixed place and time (Traxler, 2010). One large multi-campus Australian University was the first tertiary institution to spearhead the roll out of iPads in 2013, with eleven thousand iPads distributed to all new first-year undergraduate students. The University's analysis revealed that over 80% of logins to the university's e-learning system were from an Apple device, thus the iPad was the University's device of choice. This analysis also revealed that the variety of applications (apps) and programs available would likely benefit student education (University of Western Sydney [UWS], 2015b). The iPad roll out formed part of the university's strategy to engage students with a mobile device that would allow for flexibility and freedom in their studies. It now forms an integral component of the *blended learning* strategy, integrating face-to-face, online and community-based interactions (UWS, 2015a). This has seen large-scale face-to-face lectures replaced by the opportunity to view lectures online or as a *Podcast* (UWS, 2015).

## **Background**

A review of 17 known research papers about the exclusive use of Apple iPads in tertiary education showed study sample sizes ranged from < 50 ( $n=9$ ), 51-100 ( $n=2$ ) and >100 ( $n=6$ ). Predominately, these studies were conducted in the United States of America (USA) ( $n=10$ ) and Australia ( $n=3$ ). We thematically categorised these 17 articles as follows: i) impact of iPads on academic engagement; ii) different implementation of strategies and samples; iii) workflow and functionality of the iPad's features and; iv) mobile applications (apps) in learning in learning.

### ***Impact of iPads on academic engagement***

The use of the iPad in student learning was reported in 14 papers. A positive association was found in a USA study, between the use of the iPad and increased academic engagement, motivation and perception of learning (Diemer, Fernandez, & Streepey, 2012). Learning was reportedly enhanced as the iPad was used as a tool to source content during class discussions. This easy access to information fostered more in-depth discussions, problem solving and a collaborative learning environment. Classes were reported to be fun, interesting and exciting, which increased the motivation of students to learn course content (Rossing, Miller, Cecil, & Stamper, 2012; Wakefield & Smith, 2012). Despite these reported benefits, its potential to distract learners and create frustration in the classroom was discussed in two Australian studies (Brown & McCrorie, 2015; Kinash, Brand, Mathew & Kordyban, 2011), as students considered the iPad a novelty and distraction to their studies. Conversely, two studies reported that students who focused on accessing educational material in the classroom did not find the iPad a distraction, rather it enhanced the retention of information (Eichenlaub, Gabel, Jakubek, McCarthy, & Wang, 2011; Klapdor & Uys, 2013).

### ***Different implementation strategies and samples***

Seventeen studies described and evaluated very different implementations of the iPad initiative. For example, in a small-scale US study, research was based on twelve graduate students who had purchased their own iPad (Alyahya & Gall, 2012). In contrast, in a large-scale institution-wide initiative in the -United Arab Emirates, 41,000 iPads were distributed to all first year students and staff over a nine-week period in which time structured iPad training sessions occurred. The duration of the iPad initiatives varied widely, ranging from one week (Hahn & Bussell), to two years (Rossing et al., 2012). The distribution of the iPads involved both staff and students. However, eleven studies involved students exclusively (e.g., Hahn & Bussell, 2012). The issue regarding iPad ownership and affordability was raised in several studies; in one study 40 iPads were deployed as a shared resource among 217 students (Rossing et al., 2012), and in the study by Kinash et al., (2011) students loaned an iPad for a two-week period. In two other studies the issue of iPad affordability following the iPad study was raised (Eichenlaub et al., 2011; Sloan, 2012). Overall, the variations in sample groups, populations and duration of studies allowed for a diverse range of findings.

### ***Workflow and functionality of the iPad's features***

There were wide variations in the feedback on the workflow and functionality of the iPads' features. Reportedly, the most important feature of the iPad was its portability (Alyahya & Gall, 2012; Eichenlaub et al., 2011; Hahn & Bussell, 2012; Kinash et al., 2011; Smith, Kukulska-Hulme & Page, 2012). Students commended the lightweight design, excellent battery life, quick start up and intuitive touch screen interface as superior compared to a laptop (Eichenlaub et al., 2011). Students also reported preferring the iPad over their laptop when it came to annotating and reading documents making for a more paper-free learning environment. Furthermore, the participants found it was easier to bring an iPad to class than a laptop (Hahn & Bussell, 2012) in relation to its size (Eichenlaub et al., 2011). However, some students preferred a laptop or computer for assignments

(Alyahya & Gall, 2012; Klapdor & Uys, 2013). In contrast, the limitations of the iPad were noted including the absence of Flash (Culen & Gasparini, 2011); Universal Serial Bus (USB) output (Eichenlaub et al., 2011); printing functions; and the appropriate size of the touch-screen keyboard (Rossing et al., 2012).

### ***Mobile applications in learning***

Learning and teaching was assisted through the use of apps available on the iPad. A regional planning undergraduate student used the iBrainstorm app to copy diagrams, then typed notes onto the Pages app, finding their learning was aided by the iPad's organisation of academic notes (Eichenlaub et al., 2011). In contrast, some students found taking notes on the iPad difficult, as the application iAnnotate was difficult to master and that two apps could not be opened at once (Eichenlaub et al., 2011). Further concerns were noted in a Norwegian study where students claimed it was time consuming to learn how to use new apps as the emphasis was on obtaining good grades, not exploring the app possibilities (Culén & Gasparini, 2011), highlighting the need to guide students on the use of apps relevant to their learning needs.

To summarise, the iPad's use in tertiary education appears to have benefits and limitations within a technologically advanced classroom. Missing from the literature were any studies that reported on the lived experience of nursing students when using the iPad for tertiary education. This study sought to fill this gap by exploring nursing students' perspectives on the lived experience of using the iPad for their tertiary study.

### **Methodology**

To capture the students' lived experience Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the aim of IPA is to make sense of the reality of the participants' lifeworld (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Understanding this reality requires the researcher to describe and interpret the essence of the lived experience for the individual (Polit & Beck, 2006). Individual interviews were conducted with undergraduate nursing students between March and June, 2015. A semi-structured interview schedule focused on the following topics: the use of the iPad in the academic environment; the integration of the iPad into a blended learning environment; and the positive and negative features of the iPad to assist learning. Ethical approval was granted from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval ID: H10902) and all participants provided written informed consent.

### **Participants**

To generate information rich cases, participants ( $n=9$ ) were recruited using a purposive sampling method as participants "have firsthand experience with the phenomenon under investigation" (Gillis & Jackson, 2002, p. 184). In accordance with IPA, the sample is typically homogeneous due to the small sample size, allowing for the understanding of a particular group, not the generalisations of a wider population (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this case, nursing students with the direct experience of using an iPad for learning were recruited from one campus of the university. The recruitment process involved placing a general advertisement for second year nursing students on the university's e-learning platform. Inclusion criteria were: 1) second year undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing student; 2) received a complementary iPad from the university 12 months prior to the study; 3) aged 18 years or over; and 4) based at one campus of the university. Exclusion criteria were: 1) any student currently being taught by the interviewer. As the interviewer was in a position of authority, care was taken not to entice student participation and a neutral interview location was selected for the interviews. Participant demographic data are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Data

| Participants N=9                             |           |            |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Gender                                       |           |            |
|  | Female    | 9          |
| Mean age, years (range)                      |           |            |
|  |           | 31 (21-44) |
| First in family to undertake further studies |           |            |
|  | Yes       | 3          |
|  | No        | 6          |
| Country of Birth                             |           |            |
|  | Australia | 7          |
|  | Asia      | 2          |
| Language spoken at home                      |           |            |
|  | English   | 8          |
|  | Hindi     | 1          |
| Years using an iPad                          |           |            |
|  | 1         | 3          |
|  | 2         | 1          |
|  | 3         | 5          |
| Previous ownership of an iPad                |           |            |
|  | Yes       | 4          |
|  | No        | 5          |

## Procedure

Interviews were either conducted in the university library meeting rooms or over the phone (n=2). Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Interview data were transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service; the confidentiality of the participants was maintained by the use of a re-identifiable code to replace participant names.

## Data analysis

Thematic analysis was coupled with unpacking the interpretative relationship of and between the transcripts, in order to understand the content and complexity of the meanings. The steps involved were described by Smith and Osborn (2008) and required the documentation of initial notes and emergent themes. The emergent themes were then given a superordinate theme title, and finally a master table of superordinate and emergent themes was developed using keywords. The line and page number were included to link the themes to the transcript. This graphic representation on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet allowed for the observation of abstraction, polarisation and contradictions. The dependability of this research was enhanced through the consistency of the interview approach by using a participant interview schedule. Confirmability was established by developing a transparent audit trail which allowed the research team to guarantee the trustworthiness of the data.

## Findings

The data analysis revealed one overarching theme that captured the essence of the experience for all nine participants: *Unleashing the iPad's potential for nursing students*. The overarching theme encompasses the concept that the iPad's potential for students was not realised and participants' described the importance of metaphorically 'unleashing' this potential. Although the University provided the iPad to students free of charge, the participants acknowledged that they did not realise all the capabilities of the iPad in support of their studies. This theme is encapsulated by the four superordinate themes, listed in Table 2, which tell the participant's journey; the iPad encounter, adapting to the Apple device, connecting technology to learning, and unrealised capabilities. Each of the four super-ordinate themes are then supported by two to three emergent themes. All participant quotes use pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Table 2: Themes

| <b>Overarching theme</b>                                    |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Unleashing the iPad's potential for nursing students</i> |  |
| Superordinate themes  | Emergent themes  |
| 1. iPad encounter   | 1.1 Supporting their studies<br>1.2 Necessity versus affordability<br>1.3 Note taking ability                                    |
| 2. Adapting to the Apple device                             | 2.1 Identified limitations<br>2.2 Assignment preparation: PC versus iPad<br>2.3 Design features and lifestyle                    |
| 3. Connecting technology to learning                        | 3.1 Students' learning styles within a blended learning environment<br>3.2 Tutors' use of the iPad<br>3.3 Technological deficits |
| 4. Unrealised capabilities                                  | 4.1 The missed opportunity<br>4.2 Providing a foundation of support  |

## **Theme 1: The iPad encounter**

### ***1.1 Supporting their studies***

This first theme identified how the participants utilised the iPad to support their studies. Cath explained “it is great, good in class or if you need to quickly look something up if you are unsure about a word or something like that it is really good” (P8). Ann was a new user to the iPad and revealed: “at first I had no clue how to use an iPad I had never really touched one, but once I started getting used to it, it became really beneficial in the classroom (P3). Jo described the use of the iPad in tutorials: “in class you can just open up the article, quickly skim through it again so that you pick up the main points and that has been a brilliant thing” (P2). Val mentioned the benefit of the iPad in group work: “if the teacher asks to do the group work and research, this [the iPad] is very helpful, if we don't have that [the iPad] we don't know what to do (P5). Ann mentioned: “I can access anything I need to in class without having to carry around a huge bulky laptop, it also saves on things like printing as a poor student that is important” (P3). The reference to a “poor student” highlighted the financial advantage of the iPad. Beth used the iPad to practice for the assessment: “the videos have been really, really good so while I am practicing for the OSCA [Objective Structured Clinical Assessment] I will have a look at the YouTube videos (P9). In contrast, Cath's experience of using the iPad was: “I find it a bit of a distraction” and went on to say “probably one of the main things I use it for is to read the news” (P8). Considering the iPad was chosen because of the range of educational apps, the participants used minimal apps in support of their studies. Jess used “Blackboard” and also “Evernote” (P7). However, Ann did not use any apps: “none really relevant to university other than the YouTube app” (P3).

### ***1.2 Necessity versus affordability***

The participants found the iPad beneficial for their studies, however when asked if they would have purchased their own iPad to support their studies, eight of the participants said no, mainly for financial reasons. Ann stated: “I can see it is beneficial, but to be honest I would never have bought one on my own without actually receiving it” (P3). Similarly, Eve stated: “I was limited again to be able to afford another electronic device so to be given one from the university has helped me in that situation” (P6). Eve's reference to “another electronic device” revealed that she initially purchased an alternative device to the iPad.

### **1.3 Note taking ability**

The majority of participants did not use the iPad to document or take notes. All nine participants hand wrote their notes and only two typed notes on the iPad in addition to handwriting. This preference to hand write notes was related to age, technological skills and learning styles. Lyn indicated: “I feel that is how I learn, I feel I am that sort of learner, I am not like the young kids [whispers 35 years old] I am not 20 just out of high school and is used to all this technology, I’m old school, I like to write it down on paper” (P1). Ann mentioned her slow typing skills as a barrier to digital note taking: “I am not a very fast typist so I prefer just to scribble as I hear it” (P3). Jess used both methods: “sometimes I use the iPad, the Evernote app ...important notes then I write it on my notebook (P7). Jo used digital note taking in clinical classes: “in clinical classes because you don’t really take in pens and paper, you have your iPad and you can quickly type in information that the teacher says (P2). Jo was aware that there were apps to annotate but was unsure where to find the ones that have Word processing capabilities for the iPad: “probably more handwriting ...I mean I don’t know whether it is because I haven’t looked properly but I don’t find that the iPad itself has enough, umm like Word ... Word apps,” (P2).

## **Theme 2: Adapting to the Apple device**

### **2.1 Identified limitations**

The iPad is an Apple product which Sue commented was not compatible with the learning materials in the undergraduate degree: “you are providing us with an iPad which is an Apple based product and that is what we are meant to be using and then you tell us we have to download and use Chrome or something and Apple doesn’t like Chrome anyway so it all just becomes a big mess” (P4). Eve commented: “being an Apple device you are restricted sometimes with the kind of files you often open” (P6) and Jo mentioned: “some of the quizzes we have to do we cannot use the iPad” (P2). When utilising the iPad for her studies Cath mentioned: “iPads you cannot back anything up really, there is no USB [Universal Serial Bus] to easily save stuff and I so I just think the laptop is better, better keyboard to type and everything” (P8).

### **2.2 Assignment preparation: PC (Personal Computer) versus iPad**

All nine participants did not use the iPad for assignment preparation as they identified several limitations. Val’s reason for using the laptop was: “if I do my assignment I prefer to do with my laptop ...I can copy and paste and I can do a lot of things on there ...I prefer laptop ...old generation, that is what I am” (P5). The “copy and paste” mode can be performed on an iPad. This lack of knowledge on how to use the iPad confirms the overarching theme and the need to ‘unleash the iPad’s potential for nursing students’. Jess revealed that her preference to use a laptop for assignments was due to familiarity and relative comfort with this device. “I would still go for the laptops because I am comfortable with them, I don’t like feel comfy with the iPad as much as the laptop ...I like the real keyboard” (P7).

### **2.3 Lifestyle and design features**

Although participants preferred the laptop for assignment preparation, the iPad did make an impression on participants in the area of lifestyle and design features. Jo noted: “I use the iPad all the time because it is transportable; it is so easy you can take it anywhere” (P2). Beth further added: “I mean it is more portable and definitely more convenient than using a laptop” (P9). Eve commented: “it is lightweight; it is small” (P6). Val also makes the comparison between the iPad and laptop: “it is quite easy to hold in bed instead of laptop in front of your face” (P5). Five of the participants agreed the iPad was their preference of device to support their studies due to the design features, however a PC was the technology of choice for assignment preparation.

### **Theme 3: Connecting technology to learning**

#### ***3.1 Students' learning styles within a blended learning environment***

Since 2012, the undergraduate nursing curriculum had a blended learning strategy, incorporating the iPad, which included a mix of face-to-face learning, online lectures and learning activities, lectures and workplace experience. The majority of participants stated enjoying the blended learning approach in comparison to previous styles of learning involving face-to-face lectures. Lyn commented: "I think the access that you can watch things over and over again, I think back in the day you used to have lectures and you know you would only get one shot at it, but now I can, if I need to, access and watch something over" (P1). Val enjoyed blended learning: "English is my second language I prefer the online as well as in the class" (P5). Lyn described the disadvantages to an online only elective: "I sort of missed coming to uni and doing a tute and clarifying things" (P1). Time was an important factor for Ann's learning: "the thing I like about the blended learning is I have the time to do the lectures when I have the time so it makes it a lot easier in the sense of time management" (P3). Beth agreed: "if it was all face-to-face and I had to come in five days a week I wouldn't have done the degree" (P9). Overall, the 'blend' of learning was well received by the participants and was conducive to their learning styles.

#### ***3.2 Tutors' use of the iPad***

The majority of participants had never observed the tutor's use an iPad. Cath stated: "no, I can't say I have ever seen a tutor use the iPad or even direct it or even mention it in class" (P8). Only three participants stated they had seen or been directed to use the iPad by the tutor in the classroom: "my tutor will have her iPad out and so she will walk around and she'll go through it so she is seeing what we are seeing which is good so we are on the same track" (P2). Considering a large percentage of the tutors are casual and hence do not receive an iPad, this may be one of the reasons the iPad was not used by tutors. One participant expressed concern that the iPad would replace the teacher: "I prefer communication between the teacher and student rather than having the iPad as the teacher so to speak" (P2).

#### ***3.3 Technological deficits***

This theme emphasised how the participants acquired the technological skills to use the Apple iPad device. Ann sought family support: "I kind of got my nephew to show me how to use it because he uses the iPad ...how to download stuff and how to browse and everything because I had no idea what to do with it" (P3). Ann's comment "I had no idea" emphasised how perplexing it was to be given a device with no instructions. Furthermore, Ann revealed: "I consider myself quite tech savvy when it comes to computers and phones and all that but I don't use Apple products ...I thought how the hell do I use this" (P3). Cath used a variety of resources: "I went to the Apple store to ask them a few things and otherwise I have just Googled stuff or I have picked my boyfriend's brain" (P8). Cath also sought assistance from other students: "trying to get documents open in Word can be a bit of a nightmare but talking to other students ...they have sort of helped me ...maybe I am just an incompetent user" (P8). This theme highlighted the frustration of the students and linked into the overarching theme that there is a need to unleash the iPad's potential as well as providing training on how to use technological devices.

### **Theme 4: Unrealised capabilities**

#### ***4.1 The missed opportunity***

Without a foundation of support and training, the iPad could not be used to its potential and minimal instruction was given to the participants on how to use the iPad for their studies. Lyn said: "it was pretty hectic on the iPad collection day ...there were people there to help us to set it up but

then once that was done most people just walked away ...I was sitting there and I was just listening to everyone and I was just figuring it out myself" (P1). Jess further added that she would have liked assistance on its use initially: "I also think that if someone could tell me about the things that are available on the iPad it could be much easier because I found the MyC3 and the Blackboard much later" (P7). Jess's reference to "much later" emphasised the time that had elapsed between receiving the iPad and then finding out about the available apps. Similarly, Eve mentioned: "I do not know how to use OneNote yet and OneNote would be helpful to use on there because I could write and add text to the documents that I am already getting from the tutorial" (P6). Beth was asked if she used the Blackboard app which is one of the main learning platforms and she said: "no, I don't know how to use Blackboard, I wouldn't have a clue they showed us how to turn it on and put your password in" (P9). Lyn expressed she would have appreciated help with the iPad beyond the basic set up. Lyn remarked: "even though I am a little bit tech savvy I would have still liked someone to go through the process...these are the apps you need and so forth" (P1).

#### **4.2 Providing a foundation of support**

Having missed the opportunity to instruct the participants on how to use the iPad to support their nursing studies, it was evident that the participants consequently found it difficult to unleash the iPad's potential. Ann believed: "I think it would be really, really helpful if they would put on workshops for students on how to use the iPad ...at the start of a semester" (P3). Eve similarly felt she would benefit from an iPad workshop: "I think it would be beneficial again to have a workshop or someone to facilitate how to use apps that you download like OneNote or Notability or even using vUWS [virtual UWS] ...because it is software that would benefit you in your studies if you knew how to use it properly" (P6). Jo suggested: "I think things like the you know Blackboard and the OWA app really should be spoken about ...sometimes they can come pre-loaded ...so that they are there ready to go once the student starts" (P2). Sue further commented on apps: "the apps are just a plethora of things and unless you know what you are looking for, you can spend absolutely hours and days trying to find things" (P4). A salient comment was made by Jo as to the purpose of the iPad: "...how much do you need to use it, do I have to use it every day, do I have to bring it to all my classes, what is the purpose of having this iPad when I don't know how to use it properly" (P2). The lack of guidance on the basic use and "purpose of having the iPad" highlighted the uncertainty for some surrounding the necessity of the iPad to support their studies.

#### **Discussion**

This research supported current literature, in that students appreciated the convenience of accessing the Internet and learning material in the classroom (Alyahya & Gall, 2012; Hahn & Bussell, 2012). It revealed that the majority of participants preferred hand writing notes over digital note taking. Like Kinash et al. (2011) students felt it was "more beneficial to take pen and paper notes" (p. 7). In contrast, Alyahya and Gall (2012) highlighted the iPad as the main device for note taking and accordingly Mang and Wardley (2012) outlined the benefits of digital note taking such as a reduction in cost and time of printing notes, carrying paper, and the advantage of instant access to documents. Despite the mixed views, this research challenges the literature that suggests the millennial generation, born between 1977 and 1995, have advanced skills with using digital technology. Five of the nine participants were Millennials, an era rich with technology and digital media, (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005), and yet they did not use the iPad for note taking and required assistance with its use.

Like Hahn and Bussell (2012), our participants identified compatibility issues between the software and device which limited access to learning resources. Participants noted a key limitation of the iPad was the absence of a USB which was raised in other studies (Culén & Gasparini, 2011; Eichenlaub et al., 2011; Kinash et al., 2011). Likewise, the keyboard size was another limitation

and this finding is supported by Rossing et al. (2012). To address this issue, students in the study by Eichenlaub et al. (2011) emphasised the significance of hardware add-ons such as a wireless keyboard, docking station, conductive stylus or apps that improved note taking without the use of a keyboard. Rossing et al (2012) felt the device was initially confusing due to its unfamiliarity; creating frustration and increasing operation time. Some of our participants had similar issues with the use of apps and the software, despite some already owning an iPad. Despite these limitations, our participants still favoured the portability and convenience of the iPad in contrast to the size of a laptop. In support of Klapdor and Uys (2013) the PC or laptop was still the preferred device for assignment preparation.

The iPad allowed the participants to access learning material at their convenience, underscoring the flexibility of the blended learning strategy which may have the benefit of increasing student engagement (Van Doorn & Van Doorn, 2014). Access and eligibility however for staff was limited to permanent academic staff; casual or fixed term staff did not receive an iPad (UWS, 2015). According to the National Tertiary Education Union (2013) “over 50% of teaching across the university sector is now done by casuals” (p. 3). This represents a large percentage of teaching staff who would not qualify for an iPad and may be a factor hindering the success of the blended learning strategy using the iPad.

Finally, this research has uncovered the need for preparation and training of students when commencing an iPad initiative. The importance of structured iPad training sessions and informal activities in preparation for an iPad initiative cannot be underestimated (Cavanaugh, Hargis, Munns & Kamali, 2013). Cordier, McAuliffe, Wilson, Totino, Dender, Smith and Stephens. (2015) advised the benefits of extensive training and support for students and staff prior to the implementation of learning technology. We strongly support Wakefield and Smith (2012) and Nicolle and Lou’s (2008) sentiments in that there must be commitment and accountability on universities when integrating technology for learning to ensure that both students and staff are provided with not only the resources, but the support and skill development in the use of technology. Evidence-based ways to achieve this in an appropriate, feasible and effective manner are needed.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Future research could be widened to focus on tutors, thereby gaining a different perspective as their perceptions and experiences would add valuable insight to these findings and uncover the barriers for tutors. Additionally, an action research project based on educating students and staff how to integrate the iPad into teaching would add significantly to the evidence base for m-learning. Future research could identify if the design limitations identified within this research have been resolved with future generations of iPads released and if other portable devices may be more suitable for student use.

### **Limitations**

Using IPA, this research was reliant on the participants involved, their ability to self-disclose and express their thoughts effectively. Two participants were from a Non-English Speaking Background and had difficulty understanding some questions, further one of these interviews was conducted via the telephone. Telephone interviews are a convenient method, however are “often less effective” (Polit & Beck, 2006, p. 241). The voluntary nature of the recruitment strategy resulted in an all-female sample; this was not totally unexpected as the majority of nursing undergraduate students were female. Whether having a number of male participants would have altered the findings remains open to conjecture, however as males and females are reported to have different learning styles (Wehrwein, Lujan & DiCarlo, 2007) our findings cannot be generalised. Despite this, there was a wide age range of participants from 21 to 44 years, providing insight from two generations.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the iPad has only been on the market for seven years, this research base is still in its infancy and technology will continue to advance rapidly challenging traditional learning styles and teaching philosophy. The demand for learning anywhere and anytime has forced universities to adapt their learning frameworks. The implementation of the iPad initiative, combined with the blended learning strategy, has provided an opportunity for students to learn ubiquitously with a mobile learning device. This research has given voice to nursing students who tell us that the iPad is a useful device to support tertiary studies, but much support is needed to avoid the potential pitfalls in any wholesale rollout approach using technology for learning.

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**The authors may be contacted via**  
c.walker@westernsydney.edu.au

## **The Mental Health of Australian University Students**

Vivienne Browne  
Senior Policy Analyst, Orygen  
The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health

Jonathan Munro  
Head of Counselling & Psychological Support Services  
Southern Cross University

Jeremy Cass  
Manager  
RMIT Counselling Service.

### **Abstract**

*Australian and international research suggests university students are experiencing heightened psychological distress, in part due to academic and financial pressures, isolation, loneliness and poor self-care. University years also often coincide with the critical transition period (between the ages of 17 and 25 years) when mental illness is most likely to onset.*

*While the Australian Government's higher education policies have driven increases in participation and equity, little attention has been given to supporting the 'mental wealth' of students and responding to experiences (and risk factors) of mental ill-health which can place them at risk of academic failure. Further, mental health and suicide prevention policies across all levels of government have focused on providing educational support within primary and secondary school settings and largely ignored the role of tertiary education. This is despite the significant numbers of Australian young people engaged in these settings.*

*There remains contention about the extent of the problem and whether the core business of higher education delivery includes supporting students' mental health and wellbeing. Regardless, universities across Australia have been independently developing policies and programs to respond to mental health issues presenting on campus. As such, national leadership and guidance is needed to: a) improve data collection on the prevalence of mental ill-health among university students; b) articulate the reasonable expectations of universities in responding to students' mental health issues; c) describe opportunities for partnership between universities and community mental health services; and d) promote evidence-based, appropriate and acceptable programs and interventions.*

**Keywords:** mental health, university students, counselling services, policy, early intervention

### **Introduction**

In May 2017, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health (Orygen), released the report *Under the radar: The mental health of Australian university students* (Orygen, 2017). The report aimed to:

- a) Build an understanding of the prevalence of mental ill-health, impact and help-seeking behaviours among university students.
- b) Identify evidence for effective interventions and good practice.
- c) Highlight current gaps in policy, program and institution responses.
- d) Recommend future directions for higher education and mental health policy makers, as well as sector leaders.

While the report focuses on issues for university students, the authors recognise that a number of universities are dual sector, in that they deliver both higher education and vocational education and training (VET).

In April 2016, the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) Heads of Counselling Services, participated in a symposium hosted at RMIT in Melbourne, Australia. The organisers of this event provided Orygen with a valuable opportunity to present to, and consult, attendees. The common experiences of this group, who are at the coal face in delivering supports to students, contributed to the recommendation for national action on this issue.

## **Prevalence**

The paucity of Australian research and data on Australian university students' mental health makes it difficult to accurately describe the extent of the issue. Among the general population of young people we know that one in four will have an experience of mental ill-health in any given year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) and that 75 % of mental illness onsets before the age of 24 years (Kessler et al., 2005).

Along with findings from international research, suggesting higher prevalence of depression and anxiety among university cohorts compared to a broader population of 18-24 year olds (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013), a number of identified Australian-based studies reported high to very high levels of distress among university students (Larcombe, Finch, & Sore, 2014; Leahy et al., 2010; Mulder & Cashin, 2015; Stallman, 2010). However, many of these studies identified limitations regarding the size and diversity of the samples and in the reliance on self-report measures. Another paper analysing the results from three Australian national surveys conducted in 2007-2008 found tertiary students (including higher education and VET) were more likely to experience mild to moderate levels of psychological distress than non-students, although differences were not found for high distress (Cvetkovski, Reavley, & Jorm, 2012).

In April 2017, an Australian survey on the mental health of tertiary students found 65% of respondents aged 16-25 years reported high or very high psychological distress while 35.4% had thoughts of self-harm or suicide (headspace & National Union of Students, 2017). While an important survey, with over 3000 respondents, the sample was self-selected, suggesting a skew and bias within the data.

Aggregating counselling service client data has been difficult due to a lack of standardised screening/assessment tools and measures used and other opportunities to build our understanding are being missed. For example, the annual *Student Experience* survey of over 100,000 higher education students (QILT Social Research Centre, 2017), which already asks students about their experiences accessing support services, could be augmented to include a small sub-set of questions relating to experiences of mental health and wellbeing and the perceived factors which influence this.

In this 'data-thin' environment, Australian university counselling services provide a valuable source of information on the experiences of mental ill-health among students. Many service managers and staff have described an increase in mental health presentations which are, in some instances, complex and severe in nature (Orygen, 2017). Most counselling service managers across Australia and New Zealand have indicated that they do not have the capacity to respond to service demand. Emerging issues included urgent presentations, suicidality, eating disorders and levels of psychological distress (Andrews, 2016).

To further highlight the need for mental health supports on campus, a KPMG evaluation of the Disability Support Programme found more students were presenting to disability services with mental ill-health and staff were unsure how to support these students. As a result the bulk of funding continued to support the needs of students with physical disabilities (KPMG, 2015).

There are most likely a myriad of factors influencing this increased demand for university mental health supports and services. Due to participation targets in higher education policy following the Bradley Review recommendations (Bradley, 2008), there is now a significant population of Australian university students, 1.4 million in 2015 (Department of Education, 2016). Driven through a commendable equity agenda in higher education, an increasing number of these students are the first in their family to attend university, from low socioeconomic backgrounds (SES), rural and regional areas and have an identified disability (including mental ill-health) (Universities Australia, 2017).

Students are also likely to have higher levels of mental health literacy following exposure to awareness campaigns and prevention/early intervention programs in secondary and even primary school. More than ever, young people are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify their own mental health issues, or mental health issues in their peers, and seek support.

### **Risk factors**

A number of specific risk factors contribute to poor mental health among university students. Academic pressures and performance expectations are significant issues facing students (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013). Many students are cognisant of the 'rising bar' for qualifications in Australia (VicHealth & CSRISO, 2015) and are extending study into post-graduate qualifications, while enhancing their resume, and competitive edge, through a range of extracurricular activities.

Financial pressures and low SES are also associated with higher levels of psychological distress and mental disorders among university students (Cvetkovski et al., 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Stallman, 2010). A Universities Australia (2013) report found that among students, two-thirds were worried about their financial situation and 17% reported regularly going without necessities (including food) because they were unable to afford them. Many students combine work and study (sometimes full-time loads), impacting on their quality of life, their social relationships and other risk factors for mental ill-health including lifestyle – such as poor diet and alcohol use (Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013) and insufficient sleep (Hershner & Chervin, 2014; Thomee, Harenstam, & Hagberg, 2012). While struggling to 'make ends meet' during their time at university, many students are also accruing significant future debt. In 2016-17 the estimated average student HELP debt was \$19,100, taking approximately 8.8 years to repay (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

Rural and regional (Mulder & Cashin, 2015), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Toombs & Gorman, 2011) and international students (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2011) appear to be at increased risk of experiencing poor mental health while at university. For these young people, the stressors of university life can be compounded by relocation from families, friendship and support networks, cultural connections and traditional lands. Analysis of data from the 2013 *Student Experience Survey* found low SES, rural/regional and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more likely to cite health and stress reasons for considering an early course exit, compared to high-socioeconomic, metro and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for whom the main reasons for considering an early exit included: boredom, change of direction and career opportunities (Edwards & McMillan, 2015).

Meanwhile, negative and harmful experiences on campus can further impact mental health outcomes and the need for support services. On 2 August 2017 the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) released *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Harassment at Australian Universities*. This report presented the results of the largest ever national survey of Australian university students on sexual harassment and sexual assault. These results included that one in five survey respondents had experienced sexual harassment at university in 2016 and 1.6% had experienced sexual assault in a 'university setting' in 2015 or 2016 (AHRC, 2017).

### **Help-seeking**

Australian research suggests that among university student populations more than half are unlikely to seek help for mental health issues (Stallman & Shochet, 2009; Wynaden, Wichmann, & Murray, 2013). Students report not wanting to be seen as less capable than their peers and/or not knowing where to seek help. Personal stigma is particularly evidenced among young men, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students and students from low SES backgrounds (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009).

Young people identify that their preferred sources for seeking help are family and friends (Mission Australia, 2014). Peer-based programs have flourished on university and college campuses, both in Australia and internationally including batyr@uni (Australia), jack.org (Canada) and Student Minds (UK). On some campuses, peer programs appear to have developed through student action and/or a growing awareness that students themselves can be accessible and acceptable mental health advocates and facilitators of help-seeking to appropriate, evidence-based care.

### **Impact**

'Mental wealth' is a term that has gained traction in mental health advocacy and policy discussions (McGorry, 2017). In this context it refers to the social and economic productivity which can be achieved from supporting a mentally healthy population and providing effective and early treatment of mental ill-health.

*Under the radar* highlights the potentially significant costs of not fostering mental wealth within the university environment. The *2016 Student Experience Survey* found that among students who were considering exiting their course, 41% cited health and stress reasons (QILT Social Research Centre, 2017). Early course exiting has an obvious individual impact. This includes future difficulties/delays entering the workforce and exacerbated experiences of mental ill-health through a perception of failure, damaging self-esteem and self-worth.

The impact on university staff and services is already evident through the demand for campus counselling and disability services. Teaching staff in tertiary education have also reported difficulties in determining appropriate responses when mental ill-health impacts a student's capacity to complete necessary course requirements, including examinations and work-placements (Venville, Street, & Fossey, 2014).

Meanwhile, the Australian Government provides a significant amount of funding to higher education providers, subsidising tuition costs, providing scholarships and funding other programs, such as the *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* to support participation among Australians from low SES backgrounds. It is important that these investments not only increase access to higher education but support attainment outcomes for students and the broader community.

In Australia, an economic cost-benefit study of investing in university student mental health has not

been undertaken. However, a study in the United States found a social return of \$6.49 on every \$1 spent by the government on prevention and early intervention in college student mental health. This was based on mitigating against course incompleteness, loss of future workforce potential and downstream mental health system costs. The study found that for community college students (where we can draw the closest parallels with Australian TAFEs) the net benefits were estimated to be even higher at \$11.39 for each dollar invested (Ashwood et al., 2015).

### **Evidence base for programs and interventions**

There are many universities across Australia taking significant steps to develop programs and services which respond to mental health issues on campus. These have included: awareness raising events and programs, mental health and mindfulness training, comprehensive online portals (such as The Desk) and peer-based support programs.

There is good evidence for the improvement of knowledge and self-perceived capacity to respond among university staff and students trained in mental health literacy programs such as Mental Health First Aid (B. Davies, Beever, & Glazebrook, 2016; Lipson, Speer, Brunwasser, Hahn, & Eisenberg, 2014). However, as Lipson et al. (2014) found, effects are not apparent for the translation of these improvements into help-seeking behaviours or mental health service utilisation among students.

There is also evidence for the effectiveness of brief interventions (three to four sessions), as delivered by counselling and student support services, particularly among students who complete the course of therapy. Improvements in educational outcomes among students who access university counselling services are particularly evident (Connell, Barkham, & Mellor-Clark, 2008; Murray, McKenzie, Murray, & Richelieu, 2016). In the United States, self-report data from students on the educational and academic impact of accessing counselling services found 71% responded positively (Reetz, Krylowicz, Bershad, Lawrence, & Mistler, 2015).

There is some evidence for awareness and information programs. Studies have found positive shifts in attitudes from brief classroom-based education programs delivered to students and staff which raise awareness of mental health issues and services (Sharp, Hargrove, Johnson, & Deal, 2006) and in behavioural change from the delivery of strengths-based resilience building seminars (Stallman, 2011). Awareness raising programs may be more effective when delivered in conjunction with other interventions, such as training. One study found that a multifaceted intervention, including emails, posters, events and training improved willingness to seek help among students and staff (Reavley, McCann, Cvetkovski, & Jorm, 2014).

Given peer-based programs are an emerging field of practice in youth mental health it is not surprising that limited evidence exists to date regarding their effectiveness in university settings. The potential for these approaches to provide accessible and acceptable mental health supports for university students is significant. However, as found from research into a peer-based support program of university students in the United Kingdom, care needs to be taken to ensure the mental health of peers is not compromised through their task of supporting others (Student Minds, 2016).

### **Role of technology**

Technology has an increasingly important role in mental health service provision across Australia. These platforms respond to information and service preferences (particularly for young people) and address the gaps in care that exist outside normal business hours and in rural and regional areas. The Australian Government is soon to release a digital gateway to mental health care and provides people living in rural and remote areas with Medicare rebates for online videoconferencing

consultations with psychologists (Hunt, 2017a). Further, a number of highly regarded national mental health online/TeleWeb services already exist including: Lifeline, eheadspace, beyondblue and ReachOut.

For university counselling services, technology can provide students with an alternative avenue to help-seeking (particularly students less likely to engage directly through conversational means). It can also facilitate outreach through accessible and available supports which ‘match students’ schedules and not just conform to university business hours’ (Veness, 2016, p. 30). Should students find it difficult to access counselling services for support, the provision of evidence-based technological platforms can mitigate against the risk of them using less effective sources of support, such as peer advice on social media, or not engaging at all (Inglis & Cathcart, 2016). A number of regional universities have implemented an out-of-hours support service in recent years including: Southern Cross University in 2013, Charles Darwin University in 2015 and Swinburne and Griffith Universities in 2017.

There is evidence for the use of technology-based interventions among university students, with some studies finding efficacy in targeting certain mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and stress (E. B. Davies, Morriss, & Glazebrook, 2014; Farrer et al., 2013). Therapist assisted or supported online interventions have also shown efficacy for the general population (Wagner, Horn, & Maercker, 2014) and for university students, particularly when incorporated into the delivery of other online programs (Sharry, Davidson, McLoughlin, & Doherty, 2013).

## **Where are the gaps?**

### ***Policy***

At present there is no high level government direction provided to Australian universities regarding their role: a) broadly, in promoting and enhancing good mental health and wellbeing across the institution and b) specifically, in supporting of students who may be experiencing distress or mental health difficulties.

*Under the radar* also identifies the failure of mental health policies and programs to incorporate tertiary education settings within their focus. Orygen reviewed state, territory and federal government mental health and suicide prevention policies and found very few mentioned tertiary education as settings for action or program delivery. The Australian Government recently announced a \$52.6 million *National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program* (Hunt, 2017b) to be delivered in early childhood centres, primary and secondary schools. Again tertiary education settings were not included in the program’s remit. This is a significant gap in the provision of prevention and early intervention at a point of life where experiences of mental ill-health are common and the risk of onset of mental illness peaks.

Data drives policy change and the lack of regularly collected and monitored data on the experiences of mental ill-health among university students may be contributing to the minimal recognition, investment and program activity delivered by governments. What isn’t measured often doesn’t count and at present it is still possible for politicians, policy makers and university leaders to question the extent of the issue and whether it is one that really requires national attention.

### ***National guidance for whole-of-institution responses***

As identified by Veness (2016) in his report *The wicked problem of university student mental health*, very few universities in Australia have developed a whole-of-institution policy response to mental health and wellbeing. While an overarching set of guidelines for supporting tertiary students’ mental health and wellbeing was released in 2011 (University of Melbourne & Orygen

Youth Health Research Centre, 2011), there is a need to develop more comprehensive and detailed guidance for universities. This should identify action across the institution and be linked into existing policy and legislative frameworks.

In the United Kingdom, the peak body, Universities UK, has led this approach, initially through the Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Working Group. Strong support from the peak body provides clear leadership and commitment from university Vice-Chancellors. This sets the ‘tone from the top’ for action across all areas of the institution as recommended by Veness (2016). One institute that has recently responded proactively to this recommendation has been RMIT University. RMIT have adopted the Framework for Enhancing Student Wellbeing (developed through a partnership between Melbourne University, Queensland University of Technology and Latrobe University) as a whole-of-institution policy response. RMIT has also appointed a Project Manager, Student Mental Wellbeing Initiatives, to roll-out this framework over the next three years.

There are international examples of national frameworks and guidance which can be leveraged. These include the *Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good Practice Guide* (Universities UK & Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Group, 2015), as well as frameworks developed in Canada (CACUSS and CMHA, 2013) and the United States (The Jed Foundation and Education Development Center Inc., 2011). However, it is important that this guidance is translated into an Australian context and recognises the role of the Australian community mental health system.

### ***Service provision on and off campus***

Regardless of opinion on whether the role of universities should extend to mental health care provision, they do already provide support services including counselling, disability support and access to medical practitioners (specifically to provide brief interventions to support the attainment of educational outcomes).

As described earlier in this paper, there are significant concerns about the current capacity of university counselling services to meet demand. The International Association of Counseling Services Standards for University and College Counseling Services advise one counsellor for every 1000-1500 students. However, a 2013 benchmarking survey of Australian university counselling services found that, in the majority of institutions, the ratio was one counsellor to every 3000-5000 students (Andrews, 2016). Long wait periods for counselling appointments were also key concerns raised in submissions to the AHRC’s *National University Student Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*. The Commission’s report recommended universities conduct an audit of the average length of time students are required to wait for non-urgent counselling appointments, as well as the number of crisis requests, and increase resources where shortfalls were identified as a matter of urgency (AHRC, 2017).

There are also instances when the mental health care needs are of an acuity beyond the university health service’s remit, resources and expertise. However, a number of counselling service managers consulted for *Under the radar* identified that there was a perception in the community that counselling services could provide treatment for students experiencing complex and severe mental health issues and even suicide risk. Stronger linkages with community mental health services appear to be needed. This includes a greater ‘reach-in’ by these services into universities to increase service awareness, promote access pathways and ensure timely and seamless referrals out of counselling services. Some universities have sought assistance from the local health district’s mental health service in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise the collaborative relationship between the services. This agreement recognises that both services play a complementary role in the provision of care and support to students who experience mental health issues and defines the continued commitment by both services to work together to achieve agreed

joint outcomes.

## **Key Recommendations**

*Under the radar* recommends a number of areas for future action.

**1. Policy responses:** The Australian Government's higher education policy agenda must recognise that to produce a highly skilled and innovative future workforce, the core business of higher education delivery needs to include supporting the mental wealth of students. Further, mental health policies need to identify universities as settings to deliver mental health and suicide prevention programs. There is a particular opportunity for existing government-funded school education programs to be extended and provide mental health training and resources to frequent contact university staff (such as tutors and administration staff) as well as students. Meanwhile, all Australian universities should make a concerted effort to develop an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan.

**2. Measure it so it counts:** There is a need to establish a baseline data set on university student mental health from which to benchmark and monitor the impact of future policy and program responses. Existing survey instruments, such as the *Student Experience Survey* in higher education, could be augmented to include questions regarding the experiences and influences of mental health and wellbeing, as well as help-seeking behaviours and experiences. There are also opportunities to aggregate counselling service data to gain a better understanding of the presentations of mental ill-health among students seeking support from these services. This would require national coordination to standardise screening and assessment tools used within these services.

**3. Leadership and national coordination:** Both mental health and higher education sector drivers are needed to lead and coordinate a response to this issue in Australia. *Under the radar* recommends that Universities Australia and a national mental health organisation partner, such as Orygen, work together to develop a guidance, training and monitoring mechanism of university responses to student mental health. Bringing together a steering group of key stakeholders, including Vice-Chancellors, mental health sector leaders and students, to drive this process would be an effective initial step.

**4. Prioritise partnerships between mental health and higher education service delivery:** The report recommends creating interdepartmental mechanisms within government to bring together higher education and mental health portfolios. There are also opportunities to develop partnerships at a regional level by involving universities in the service planning, coordination, research and evaluation activities of the 31 Primary Health Networks, the commissioners of primary youth mental health care in Australia. As is occurring in the United Kingdom, consideration could also be given to developing guidance for co-commissioning universities and local mental health services to provide coordinated and seamless student mental health supports.

**5. Tap into technology:** Online supports and interventions are acceptable and effective for university student populations. They also respond to the changing delivery of higher education which is increasingly provided through distance education. *Under the radar* recommends that future evidence-based online mental health portals developed or funded by the government are promoted and easily accessed within existing university online student interfaces. It also recommends further research and development of online platforms tailored to the needs, help-seeking preferences and schedules of university students.

**6. Respond to heightened risk in students:** The equity agenda for higher education participation is commendable. However, there remains a need to invest in and further develop supports and

programs within universities to support at-risk students achieve academic outcomes. Particular attention is required to meet the needs of: international students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and those from low SES backgrounds or rural areas. Counselling services also need to be resourced at levels which meet the demand and complexity of presentations.

**7. Harness the capital within:** Universities are a rich environment of expertise and skills in research, education and student advocacy. They are therefore ideal settings in which to develop and trial new and innovative approaches to university student mental health. This work and knowledge translation must be incentivised, both internally within the institution and through research funding provided through the National Health and Medical Research Council and/or the Australian Research Council.

## **Conclusion**

University can, and should, be an enriching experience. For many younger students it forms part of an important transition into autonomy and independence. Yet a considerable number of students are experiencing psychological distress and mental ill-health during their studies. These experiences, if not responded to effectively, have the potential to derail students from their pathway towards productive careers and future good mental health and wellbeing. At present the mental health issues of university students are flying under the radar of policy attention and leadership in both higher education and mental health portfolios. Orygen believes there are a number of opportunities to address this within universities supported by: a) a national leadership and an approach to improving data collection and monitoring; b) building and disseminating the evidence base for effective interventions; and c) providing overarching guidance and frameworks.

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**The authors may be contacted via**  
vivienne.browne@orygen.org.au

## **Building a Restorative University**

Lindsey Pointer

PhD Candidate

Victoria University of Wellington

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the progress of Victoria University of Wellington towards becoming a Restorative University. Both reactive measures, including restorative justice as a response to conflicts and rule violations, and proactive measures, including the circle process as a way to build a positive culture rooted in restorative principles, are discussed. The article suggests that Victoria University has developed a framework for building a restorative community that can be adopted in other universities.*

### **Introduction**

During recent years, Victoria University of Wellington has taken great strides as a leader in the restorative justice field. In 2013, the Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice was established and Professor Chris Marshall was appointed as the inaugural holder of the Chair. The intention of the Chair is to serve as ‘the focus for collaborative interdisciplinary research and teaching on restorative justice theory and practice, both within the justice sector and beyond’ (Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice). The influence of the Chair has been far reaching, providing insight and leadership for public sector agencies and civil society organisations. The Chair has also had a large impact on the operations of the university, moving the campus community towards a more restorative way of operating.

The vision of the Chair of Restorative Justice and other restorative justice proponents on campus is to work towards building a Restorative University; a community in which every member is valued and feels they belong, where all contribute to the common good, and where conflict is handled in ways that promote accountability and repair. A Restorative University community fosters positive relationships founded on mutual care, respect, equality, responsibility and honest communication.

When conflicts or incidents of rule breaking occur, a restorative justice process is used as a first response. Through this process, those involved in the episode meet together, with the help of a facilitator, to discuss:

- What happened?
- Who has been affected?
- What can be done to make things right?
- What can be learned for the future?

A restorative process requires the students responsible for the harm to accept responsibility for their actions and to make amends, and provides the harmed parties with a clear voice in the process. The group works together to reach an agreement about what must be done to repair the harms and restore relationships.

In addition to implementing restorative justice on campus, members of the university have embraced the vision of a Restorative University and have begun to take steps to implement restorative practices for positive, proactive culture building. The implementation of these practices has been met with enthusiasm by both staff and students.

## **From restorative justice to a restorative society**

The restorative justice movement began as an effort at criminal justice reform, shifting towards a more relational and community-centred method of responding to crime. Following the success of the first restorative justice programs, the practice quickly expanded both geographically and in application. By the early 1990s, restorative justice had extended to schools. In the context of schools, the word ‘justice’ began to be replaced by ‘practices’ or ‘approaches’ (Marshall, 2016). Similarly, designations such as ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ were considered inappropriate and were eventually replaced with labels such as ‘the person harmed’ and ‘the person who caused the harm.’ These shifts mirrored the expansion of the sorts of conflicts and wrongdoings restorative practices were used to respond to, moving beyond issues of criminal concern to a wider array of behaviour issues.

The use of restorative practices also quickly expanded from a solely reactive function, implemented as an alternative disciplinary measure, to a proactive function focused on relationship-building, conflict-resolution skills and fostering feelings of belonging. This extension of restorative practices to a proactive, culture-change function in the schools has provided a model for other organisations and civil society more broadly of how to function more restoratively (Marshall, 2016).

Out of this expansion, the vision of a ‘restorative society’ has emerged. This vision has grown from the idea that ‘restorative justice must be perceived as a social movement dedicated to making restorative practices integral to everyday life’ (Wachtel & McCold, 2001, p. 129). In this view, the implementation of restorative justice within the criminal justice system and schools was only the beginning.

*Restorative justice is more than just a novel approach to crime control or a new set of victim-sensitive justice practices; it is the tip of a very large iceberg, a project aimed at the creation of interpersonal relationships and societal institutions that foster human dignity, equality, freedom, mutual respect, democratic engagement and collaborative governance (Marshall, 2016).*

Restorative principles are able to impact entire cultures and move families, schools, and communities towards more restorative ways of interacting (Braithwaite & Strang, 2001). This restorative social movement, as it is best understood, provides a meta-concept that emphasizes restoring and building positive relationships (Boston, 2007).

The restorative social movement calls for a widespread use of restorative practices that build relationships, provide a sense of fairness and justice, and facilitate healing. Central to this vision is the facilitation of human connection. This striving for connection is at the root of what it means to be human. As Chris Marshall notes, ‘Deeply encoded in our DNA as social beings is the need to belong in responsible and joyful community with others, to participate in relationships of mutual care and responsibility, from which we acquire our sense of individual identity, self-worth and meaning. We are hard wired to connect’ (Marshall, 2016). The notion of a restorative society furthermore resonates with the universal desire for wholeness, healing, reconciliation and peace (Boston, 2007).

In order to create a restorative society, restorative practitioners must find ways for the experience of connection present in the restorative justice conference to be experienced apart from as a response to an incident of harm. Practices such as the ‘circle’ have arisen to fulfil this need. Circles are widely used in schools and increasingly in universities, workplaces and other institutions as a way to build connections, make decisions, support or reintegrate community members, and heal after hardship (Marshall, 2016). Leading circle practitioners Kay Pranis and Carolyn Boyes-Watson give the following definition of the circle process.

*The Circle is a highly structured intentional space designed to promote connection, understanding and dialogue in a group. The Circle is a powerful tool for that basic community function of working out how we are going to be together, which includes building relationships, establishing norms, and working through differences. The Circle fulfills that basic community function: it holds a healthy balance between individual needs and group needs (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015, p. 23).*

Through the introduction of the circle process, communities have a clear tool that can be used to intentionally move the group towards more restorative ways of interacting.

A restorative society therefore is one in which restorative practices are used both reactively to respond to wrongdoing, and proactively to facilitate deeper connection through processes such as the circle. Through the implementation of both proactive and reactive restorative practices, the community achieves significant culture change.

### **Restorative university**

While restorative justice migrated into schools quite early, it has just recently made its way into the university context. Increasingly, restorative justice is being used as a response to discipline issues on university campuses with encouraging results. Research by sociologists David Karp and Casey Sacks has shown that compared to the traditional conduct model, restorative practices result in fewer appeals, less serious reoffending, higher participant satisfaction, and improvement in student learning (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Victoria University of Wellington has also seen positive results following the implementation of restorative justice to handle incidents of student misconduct. The university began accepting referrals of student misconduct cases from Residential Life in February 2016 and since then, the support and enthusiasm for the process have grown. Through the use of restorative justice, the university has been able to avoid suspensions, expulsions, and the eviction of students from university housing and has instead offered a process that more fully integrates students into the community.

Victoria University has also gone beyond the implementation of restorative justice as a response to discipline issues to begin to create a Restorative University that fosters positive relationships founded on mutual care, respect, responsibility, and honest communication at all levels. This restorative community is being built through the intentional implementation of restorative practices such as circles and the restorative conversation model that build, maintain and repair relationships within the university community throughout the year. The university uses the model of the triangle of restorative practices in order to illustrate the way that these practices build on each other. When more time and energy is spent building positive relationship based on honesty, meaningful connection, and respect, less time will be spent repairing relationships when things go wrong.

Imagine a first year university student experiencing the stress of being away from home for the first time and the pressure of his course load. He goes out for drinks with his friends and returns to his dorm intoxicated. He gets in a fight with his friend and ends up acting out violently, throwing things and striking his friend, drawing the attention of his Residential Advisor. In the past, an assault of this sort would most likely result in, at a minimum, the student being evicted from the Residential Hall. It could be that the financial strain of this loss of housing would result in the student having to take time away from university. Ultimately, the university's response to a mistake brought on by stress, alcohol, and poor coping strategies could cause a great deal more harm in the student's life. The friend who has been harmed would also be left out of the decision-making process and would not have a chance to voice his needs or concerns. The two friends furthermore may not have a chance to repair their relationship and work through the incident to move forward in a positive way.

Following the implementation of restorative justice, this student instead has the opportunity to sit down and talk with the friend and other impacted parties including the Residential Advisor. With the guidance of a facilitator, the group would discuss what had happened, how each person was impacted, and form and commit to a plan to repair the harms and make things right. This plan may include an apology and actions to improve life in the residential hall for others. It would also include measures to address the stress that led to the incident. Perhaps the student would benefit from regular meetings with the Student Support Coordinator or from being more intentionally involved in social activities in the hall.

Instead of the student being expelled from the community, the people closest to the student would make an extra effort to understand the student's experience, needs, and what can be done next to make things better for all involved.

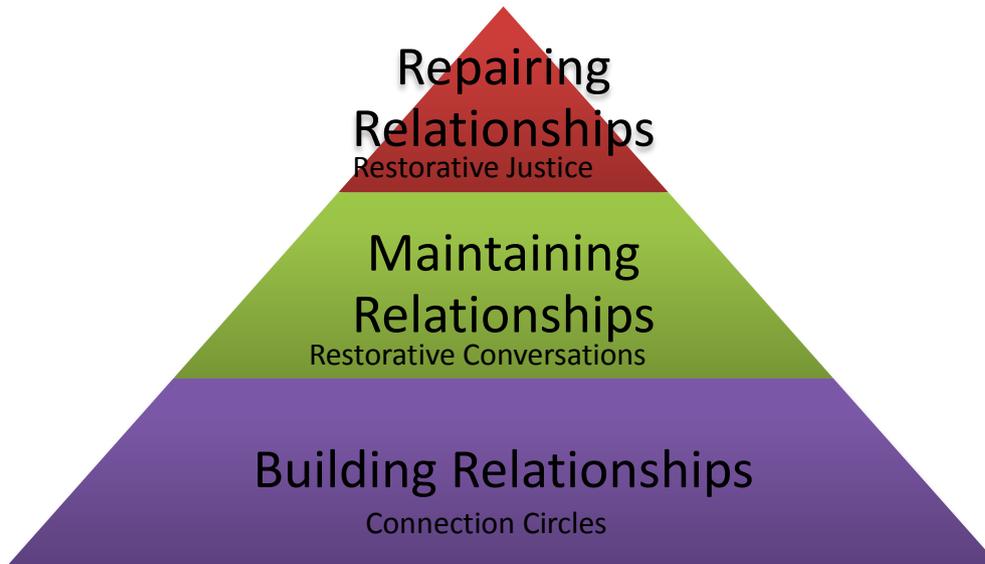
In order to offer this process to students and staff following incidents of wrongdoing, the university has taken steps to make restorative justice facilitators available on campus. As the number of referrals for restorative justice conferences continued to increase throughout 2016, Residential Life saw a need to form a team of restorative justice facilitators who could be assigned to facilitate cases after they were vetted by the Chair of Restorative Justice staff. In September 2016, the university trained a group of sixteen Victoria University staff members in restorative justice facilitation. The university entered the 2017 school year with the capacity to expand implementation greatly increased. As of 2017, restorative justice is also included in the Student Conduct Statute as the first choice response to student misconduct (Victoria University of Wellington Student Conduct Statute).

The implementation of restorative justice has received positive feedback from both students and staff. One Residential Advisor commented, 'Going from a "who needs to be punished" mindset to a "what can we do to repair this and make things right" mindset, I believe, is a clear step to making the world a better place' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire)<sup>1</sup>. Another Residential Advisor noted that restorative justice 'really placed emphasis on the idea that there may be underlying problems for the issue at hand and working towards a way to solve these issues effectively' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire). Another Residential Advisor similarly commented on the needs-centred focus of restorative justice saying, 'Considering others' needs and solving issues in a way that places the highest value on meeting others needs and ensuring learning and growth comes from mistakes and the outcomes feels positive for those involved' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire).

Residential Advisors have also noted that the restorative justice method of problem solving is applicable to other areas of their lives. One noted, '[The restorative justice training] was really useful for not just the work environment but will be useful for other parts of life' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire).

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from feedback questionnaires are shared with the permission of the participants.



*Using restorative justice to respond to issues on campus*

### **Building and maintaining relationships through circle processes and restorative conversations**

Victoria University has also begun an effort to use restorative practices proactively to build a restorative community culture on campus. This proactive effort includes a shared commitment to fostering positive relationships based on respect, empathy, accountability, and belonging. It also includes the intentional implementation of specific restorative tools, namely the connection circle and the restorative conversation model.

The connection circle is a simple but powerful tool for bringing members of a community together to build connection through open, honest sharing and empathetic listening. Open-ended questions encourage deepening levels of sharing as a community moves through the process together. The same circle tool can be used to establish group norms through asking what each member of the community needs in order to thrive in the community. It is also used to respond to conflicts and issues in the community through question rounds following the central restorative questions (What happened? Who was affected? What can be done to make things right?). Connection circle facilitators on campus are trained in how to establish a safe and supportive space to encourage open communication and community cohesion.

The restorative conversation model provides a format for holding difficult conversations one-on-one. The restorative framing of the conversation allows those in conflict to move towards greater understanding and resolution. The conversation model is easily implemented in professional relationships as well as in working with students.

This effort to build a Restorative University through proactive community building has been primarily implemented in the Residential Halls. At the beginning of the 2016 and 2017 school years, all Residential Advisors were introduced to the restorative justice approach and were also taught how to use a connection circle model to build relationships among the residents on their floor and establish group norms. The Residential Advisors were also taught how to use the connection circle to respond to group behaviour issues that impact the entire community such as vandalism, messiness and noise.

The training was met with great enthusiasm by the Residential Advisors; 100% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the training experience. Residential Advisors also saw the direct

applicability of restorative practices to their work. One Residential Advisor reported, 'I think restorative conversations and connection circles are going to play a really big role in how my floor works this year to foster community within' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire).

One Residential Advisor sent the following report after using the connection circle tool with her residents. Note that the connection circle is facilitated using a 'talking piece' so that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak. In this story, she mentions using a pair of scissors as a talking piece.

*I held a circle meeting with my floor of residents for our first floor meeting and it was WONDERFUL. After some gentle and funny ice breakers, I introduced the idea and started it off with a pair of scissors that hadn't left my hands for the last week in preparing the decorations for the floor for them. I explained the scissors symbolized my dedication to the floor and the open space I wanted to create for the sharing of ideas and skills. I set the intention of the circle as a discussion of our values/rules that are important to make everyone feel at home. The first few people passed them on without saying much, but once they got talking it was awesome! I was writing them up on a piece of card to keep on the wall and it was things like "Smiling at everyone," "Celebrating peoples' birthdays" as well as rules about cleanliness and noise. Really such a great way to start the year!<sup>2</sup>*

Residential Advisors have continued to see the positive results of implementing restorative practices as the year progresses. One Residential Advisor reported, 'We've found that simply talking respectfully and calmly to students in addition to initially establishing group norms has meant the students have responded positively' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire.)

Connection circle and restorative conversation training has also been offered for Residential Life professional staff. This group has been encouraged to use the process within staff groups, with the Residential Advisors they supervise, and with students living in the halls. Feedback about these techniques was positive as participants began integrating restorative approaches into their life at the university. One training participant noted, 'Building restorative practice both in daily conversations and within Hall communities is extremely important. We need to move away from disciplinary and blame to mending/fixing what is broken' (Restorative University Training Feedback Questionnaire).

Interest in the work being done at Victoria University has also spread to other universities. In October 2016, trainers from Victoria University travelled to the University of Newcastle in Australia to provide a restorative justice facilitator training for members of their staff and to support and advise implementation of the process. The trainers returned in January 2017 to provide training in connection circles and restorative conversations for the University of Newcastle Residential Advisors.

The growth of the Restorative University model is filling a much-needed gap for campus communities. We know that student behaviour, learning, and happiness is rooted in feelings of belonging, in feeling valued as individuals within a connected and supportive community. This feeling of belonging and connection is only accomplished when we devote time and energy to intentionally building, maintaining and repairing relationships. Restorative practices offer concrete tools and a grounding philosophy to build these thriving communities.

## Conclusion

Through the leadership of the Diana Unwin Chair of Restorative Justice and the support and commitment of many others on campus, Victoria University is becoming a Restorative University.

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<sup>2</sup> Residential Advisor, email message to author, February 29, 2016. Shared with permission from the Residential Advisor.

As the efforts of Residential Life have progressed, other areas of the university are increasingly climbing on board and beginning to implement restorative practices. The holistic approach to restorative culture change innovated by Victoria University has the potential to be adapted to a wide range of other organisational contexts and represents a promising new development in the field.

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to acknowledge Professor Chris Marshall, The Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice, for his tireless efforts in building a restorative culture at Victoria University of Wellington and beyond as well as the numerous other proponents and practitioners throughout the university.

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**The author may be contacted via**  
lindseypointer@gmail.com

## **Engendering Systemic and Cultural Leadership Practices in Residential College Communities: The Global Leadership Program at International House, the University of Sydney.**

Bradley Kunda  
Assistant Director & Residential Life Officer  
International House  
University of Sydney

### **Abstract**

*This paper is an extract from a conference presentation delivered by the author at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Collegiate Way International Conference in November 2016 in Canberra, Australia. While its aim was to build awareness around an aspect of the residential program at International House (namely its Global Leadership Program, which was researched, developed and coordinated by the author), the paper also discusses an emerging area of leadership discourse, and the ways it can be made relevant for university students.*

Modern leadership thinking has come a long way since Gould and Kolb's assertion in 1964 that 'leadership behaviour can be observed only in relation to other persons who act in response to the leader and who are collectively referred to as the *following*' (Gould & Kolb, 1964, p. 380). Today, leadership theories may be considered on a spectrum: on one hand, as the competencies and personality traits of an individual; and on the other, as complex interpersonal systems where leadership is observable at the level of organisational culture, rather than how specific individuals behave (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). This summary, of course, simplifies a field that enjoys enormous scholarly interest; one from which an extensive range of sub-fields has now emerged (for example, sustainable leadership, ethical leadership, and neuro-leadership). Grappling with the wealth of literature to find something meaningful for tertiary students living in a residential college has been the challenge of convening the Global Leadership Program (GLP) at International House, the University of Sydney. Our objective has been to give all residents – not just those in formal leadership positions – opportunities to develop practical leadership skills while making meaningful contributions to their community.

In developing a mission for the GLP at International House, and in refining our scope of inquiry into leadership, we referred to our institution's core strengths and mission statement. Like our associated international partners, the community of International Houses Worldwide has always sought to intentionally cultivate international understanding and friendship (See <http://www.ihouseworldwide.org>). To this end, it was logical to pursue a vision for the GLP that was broadly encompassing of peoples' differences, while at the same time focussing very deliberately on *global* leadership competencies.

Osland, Bird, and Mendenhall et al. define global leadership as 'a process of influencing the thinking, attitudes and behaviours of a global community to work together synergistically toward a common vision and common goals' (2006, p. 204). This definition implies a refreshing view of leadership as culture, rather than a catalogue of the competencies and traits of an individual. This culturally-based approach to defining leadership is reflected in research by, among many others, Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy, who describe leadership as a process, not a position (2015, p. 4). Similarly, Avery and Bergsteiner explore leadership as a phenomenon that emerges when people interact in order to achieve shared goals in a particular context (2011, p. 4). It is this rather more systemic view of leadership that is at the heart of the GLP, which attempts to promote global leadership potential among residents through the development of heightened self-awareness and cross-cultural competencies, as well as a commitment to the service of others.

Fifty-five students have completed our program in 2015 and 2016. The program was open to all students residing at International House, not just those who held residential leadership positions. Students entered the program upon submitting a written statement about what they hoped to learn through the GLP, which was used to elicit some degree of insight into each applicant's own leadership development, as well as their personal and professional goals. Throughout the program, we asked these students to think about creating cultures where their peers could work collectively to achieve common goals. Structured in three stages, students would begin with self-awareness exercises and then attend skills workshops with expert guest speakers, before finally undertaking a project. This paper will discuss the three main aspects of the program and the methods for reviewing student impact for each of these in turn.

One of the exercises adopted to develop each student's self-awareness has emerged out of research conducted by Hunter in the United States. The Global Competence Aptitude Assessment (GCAA) is a two-stage assessment tool that measures an individual's 'internal readiness' and 'external readiness' with respect to their global competence (Global Competence Aptitude Assessment, 2017). Hunter defines global competence as 'having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, and leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment' (Hunter, 2004, p. 81). Whereas *intercultural* competence relates to competencies specific for certain types of intercultural interaction (for example, between two specific cultures), *global* competence, while containing elements of intercultural competence, is more generalisable to interactions between any numbers of cultural groups (Hunter, 2006, p. 70). The intersection with leadership practices is in a person's aptitude to leverage their global competencies in order to interact and work effectively in culturally diverse environments, which relates nicely to the more systemic view of leadership taught in the International House GLP.

As part of the GCAA, students were given scores pertaining to their current levels of internal and external readiness for global competence. Dimensions of internal readiness included an individual's self-awareness, in addition to their levels of open-mindedness, attentiveness to diversity and risk-taking aptitude. External readiness dimensions included global awareness, historical perspectives, intercultural capability and collaboration across cultures. As a cohort, the lowest scoring dimensions were, for internal readiness 'attentiveness to diversity', and for external readiness 'historical perspectives', which amounts primarily to a general knowledge of world history. Students were then required to select their weakest internal and external readiness dimensions and were given practical activities to assist in developing their aptitude in these areas. Upon completing these activities, students were asked to write a short reflective report on their learning experience.

The results of the reflective reports show genuine attempts to engage in self-learning and personal development. By way of a few examples, one Bangladeshi student acknowledged that he was not very open minded about other cultures, and took efforts to address this by actively learning about Australian history, and developing as a result a keen interest in Australian Aboriginal history. This student took out a book from the library on Aboriginal history and started watching relevant documentaries to develop his understanding. A Chinese student, focussing on developing this same internal readiness dimension, made friends with several Japanese students and visited Japanese restaurants with them, where she learned language customs for communicating with restaurant staff, and engaged in customary prayers before eating. Lastly, an American/Japanese student took the Harvard University online unconscious personal bias tests and wrote about discovering a natural automatic preference for 'White individuals' over 'Black individuals', which she noted may unfairly affect how she treats the people she works with.

While tools for the measurement and development of self-awareness are multifarious and

numerous, the GCAA showed a uniquely relevant capacity to encourage students into conscientious self-reflection of their experience with knowledge of, and aptitude for, cross-cultural interaction. As more mature learners, students were given minimal supervision when undertaking their suggested development activities, which was considered appropriate given the highly personal nature of this aspect of their leadership development. The breadth of issues covered, and approaches attempted, in the GCAA reflective exercises suggests this tool is not only relevant but also helpful in encouraging a capacity for personal reflection and learning.

Stage 2 of the GLP consisted of four skills workshops, which were delivered by expert trainers. These highly practical workshops provided opportunities for students to discuss theories and skills associated with global leadership. These ranged from discussing Harald Bergsteiner's sustainable leadership theories, to developing strategies to effectively communicate and resolve conflict in cross-cultural contexts. Worthy of discussion here is the question of what the students actually gained from these workshops. How did these sessions frame their understanding of leadership?

A survey completed by all students at the conclusion of the program included the question: *what is your current understanding of leadership?* Virtually all responses dealt with the idea of leadership in a critical way. Respondents' approaches to defining leadership may be broadly classified as either others-centric (i.e. leadership as *culture*) or trait-based (i.e. *leader-centric*). Fifty-one per cent of participants gave qualitative responses that demonstrated an others-centric understanding of leadership, while only 18% answered with a more traditional trait-based response. Furthermore, 11% gave a trait-based response but acknowledged that the personal skills of an individual leader need to be adapted to the people being led. The remaining 20% of responses could not be said to fall within either category (Kunda, 2015). This outcome shows the majority of students reflecting a more sophisticated understanding of leadership as cultural practice rather than the more traditionally held view pertaining solely to the traits and competencies of an individual.

Stage 2 of the GLP was complemented by a series of public lectures delivered by various eminent leaders. Speakers were asked to reflect on their own experiences of leadership, and address the questions of what leadership means to them, what motivates their decision making, and what advice they would give to young aspiring leaders. Before the public talks, students enjoyed the opportunity to share a meal with each invited guest, which created opportunities for professional engagement and the development of networking skills.

In the final stage of the program, students were asked to design and implement a project that would bring residents of International House together in meaningful interaction. This project brief was kept intentionally broad so as to encourage the development of creative vision from each participant. Projects played a vital role in applying the content of the workshops and self-awareness exercises to transformational experiences that, paraphrasing the words of Mendenhall and his associates, enhance learning through high levels of complexity, intensity, emotional affect and relevance (Mendenhall, Osland & Bird, 2013, p. 118).

Students were asked to write reflective pieces that drew on the concepts taught in the workshops when delivering on their projects. Projects ranged from organising charitable fundraising events, to convening academic talks, to running cultural celebration evenings. The wide range of events and initiatives implemented by the students added significant value to the residential life experience of all students residing in the House, thereby engendering student-focussed leadership within the residential life program itself.

Overall feedback from students in the completion survey was very strong, with 89% willing to unequivocally recommend the course to residents in the next year. At the macro level of evaluating

the GLP's success at engendering leadership within the community, the wide range and student-led focus of projects supports a systemic view of leadership that ventures towards an 'organic' leadership paradigm (Avery & Bersteiner, 2011, p. 11), where the residential life programming is in part generated by, and is flexible around the needs and interests of the students themselves, who create and propagate the vision of international understanding that is at the core of the International House mission.

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## The author may be contacted

[bradley.kunda@sydney.edu.au](mailto:bradley.kunda@sydney.edu.au)

## **Using Technology to Deliver Cost-Effective Out-Of-Hours Support to At-Risk University Students**

Jonathan Munro  
Southern Cross University

Judith Austin  
Charles Darwin University

Glenda Langford  
Swinburne University

Niall Mulligan  
Lifeline, Northern Rivers

### **Abstract**

*Increasing numbers of university students are studying online. Counselling appointments via skype are becoming almost commonplace. If counselling services don't make it easy for students to access support, students will simply engage elsewhere with the risk of students seeking peer advice on social media or not engaging at all (Inglis & Cathcart 2016). The incidence of psychological distress in university students is four to five times that of the general population yet less than a third present to university counselling services (Stallman, 2010). On Australian university campuses, a rich suite of health services is provided during traditional business hours but why stop there? There are changing expectations around access to student support services and technology makes 24-hour counselling support possible and affordable while at the same time mitigating risk for universities. This paper discusses the use of an after-hours crisis support service to help callers find immediate relief from emotional distress and explore coping strategies for their current crisis until they can be referred to longer-term help.*

### **Introduction**

Veness (2016) makes the point that outreach services should be developed by all university counselling services in order to reach those students who are less likely to engage directly through conventional means. “[Counselling] service availability at each university should be matched to their students’ schedules, rather than conforming only to traditional business hours” (Veness, 2016, p. 30). Online services already exist in other sectors (for example, services such as Lifeline, headspace, beyondblue) and there is a growing body of evidence that telepsychology can reduce levels of depression (Wagner, Horne & Maercker, 2014). Telepsychology can also benefit rural and remote students who don’t have access to face to face services, as indicated by the Australian Government’s announcement on 20 April 2017 that people living in these areas will be able to claim a Medicare rebate for online videoconferencing consultations with psychologists.

### **One example of an out-of-hours support service for university students: How does it work and what does it offer?**

The Out-of-Hours support service being described here was implemented at Southern Cross University (SCU) NSW in 2013, Charles Darwin University (CDU) Northern Territory in 2015 and Swinburne University Victoria in 2017. It is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education’s Student Services & Amenities Fee and addresses the Veness Report’s (2016) recommendations in relation to outreach and accessibility, in that it:

- uses an evidence-based practice model (Woodward, Turley & Milne 2010) to relieve distress and manage immediate safety
- is easily accessible by all students – on campus, off campus, external

- works closely with and refers to university support services
- is accessible by phone or as a text-based service
- offers flexible support options in emergency situations or when the university counselling service usage exceeds capacity

The service is intended to: help callers find immediate relief from emotional distress; explore coping strategies for the current crisis; safely manage any immediate threats to life or safety; open pathways for longer-term solutions; and focus on specific next steps for the caller to take. It differs from community help-lines in that it is clearly associated with the university and there is immediate linkage for students to general practitioner medical services and to university help services. Additionally, anecdotal evidence from students at SCU indicates that some students experience less sense of stigma in contacting their own university's after-hours service rather than an external agency, resulting in students being more prepared to identify themselves rather than seeking to remain anonymous. While anonymity is still an option for callers, identifying the student allows for a richer and more effective relationship in an extended crisis.

### **Why should universities provide an out-of-hours support service?**

One in four young people will experience a mental health episode and 75% of mental health problems become apparent before the age of 25. The incidence of psychological distress in university students is four times that of same-age peers in the broader community and the rate of serious mental illness is five times that of the general population (Stallman, 2010). Many young people who have coped well up until the time of leaving home can find that, in moving away to attend university and losing the proximity of family and friends, they can become very lonely and homesick; in addition they have to cope with living in a new town, making new friends and meeting the demands of university study.

Writing in the *New Yorker*, Gregory (2015) notes that the average adolescent sends almost two thousand text messages a month; of these, more than 98% are opened and are four times more likely to be read by the recipient than are emails. Within this article Gregory cites a substantial body of research confirming the efficacy of writing as a therapeutic intervention, saying "it can act as a behavioural buffer, providing distance between a person and intense, immediate, and often impulsive feelings" (p. 30). Furthermore, young people who contact crisis text-lines could be doing so from anywhere at any time; unlike a phone call, this can be done confidentially, sometimes even safely in the presence of others "without even looking at their phone" (Gregory, 2015, p. 31) which is particularly important if they are feeling unsafe.

### **Offering out-of-hours support at Southern Cross University**

As with other universities, at SCU increasing rates of students are studying online, either because they have work or family commitments which preclude them from studying on-campus, or they prefer to study externally, even if they can come on to campus. Providing an after-hours support service is especially important to cater for the needs of online students who are not able or willing to access services on campus, particularly during normal business hours. For SCU students, the after-hours support service normally operates between 5.00 pm and 9.00 am on weekdays and offers a 24-hour service at weekends and during public holidays. The service is promoted through a variety of media and usage is encouraged in specific circumstances. Senior staff within the university have indicated support for the service, recognising that it has been of particular value following critical incidents.

There is also evidence that students are willing to use support services that are offered remotely using technology. An SCU Counselling Service survey of all Gold Coast campus students in July

2016 using Survey Monkey (Inglis et al., 2016) in which 100 students participated, revealed that the majority of these participants expressed a willingness to use technology to access counselling support. Types of support they were willing to access included:

- Skype Counselling – 14%
- Chat or IM drop in chat – 15%
- None - I would only access F2F counselling – 20%
- SMS Counselling – 25%
- Blog and Facebook Posts – 31%
- Online Support or Psychoeducation Groups – 33%
- Counselling Support via Email – 35%
- Webinars on Psychological Wellbeing – 36%
- 'Ask a Counsellor' Email – 56%

### **How the out-of-hours support service is used by SCU students**

The service can be accessed by a 1300 number either by a phone call or a text message. The on-call crisis supporters receive instant alerts and respond in real time to calls and texts. The service has a mandated call-back time of less than 30 minutes if calls exceed crisis supporter availability due to peak demand (usually before midnight). Seven thousand hours of coverage are provided each year to the respective universities that are using the service; this after-hours coverage includes nights, weekends, university breaks and public holidays. In terms of cost to the university, this is provided at about a third of the annual cost of a single counsellor for each university. There is an individual referral database for each university involved, and because each university has its own 1300 number, operators can identify where the call is coming from when they answer.

Since the original out-of-hours service was implemented at SCU in 2013, approximately 29% of calls have used the text-line with 62% of contacts being made between 5.00 pm and midnight. The majority of the caller issues have been related to university studies, family and relationships and anxiety; with bereavement, loss and suicide the next most common caller issues.

During the time that SCU was closed for severe floods earlier this year in the Local Government areas of Tweed and Lismore on the NSW North Coast of Australia, the crisis service operated 24 hours a day. One incident during the floods involved a situation where the after-hours service had been communicating with an international student stranded by floodwater, making sure that she and her husband were safe and providing reassurance about her safety and that of her house. The student was also sent relevant web links to local information about the flooding situation, so that she could see the facts herself. She was also offered assistance with finding alternative accommodation when they were finally evacuated, until the house became habitable again. The after-hours service was also getting calls from many other distressed SCU students who were emotionally distressed; many were homeless because of the flood or had lost their part-time jobs.

### **Conclusion**

The out-of-hours support service discussed here not only increases availability of support to students outside normal business hours, but also provides an alternative avenue for help-seeking through its use of technology to connect students with the service. In addition to this being a valuable crisis service for traditional on-campus students, support can be accessed by a wider range of students, including those studying externally and those who would prefer not to seek face-to-face

support.

The experience at SCU has shown that, pleasingly, there has not been a high level of usage by students; however, students have expressed appreciation and relief at having the service available:

*Caller said XXX was like no other University in terms of being supportive. The caller felt having access to a counselling service out of hours allowed her to feel highly supported.*

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**The authors may be contacted via**

Jonathan.Munro@scu.edu.au

## National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning

Cathy Stone  
The University of Newcastle, and  
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

*This paper is taken from a research project report published by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) in March 2017. For full details see the complete report at: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/opportunity-online-learning-improving-student-access-participation-success-higher-education/>*

### About the Guidelines

Online learning has become a well-recognised part of the broader landscape of higher education. It is also proving to have a critical place in widening access and equity within this landscape. Increasing numbers of students from backgrounds historically under-represented at university are taking the opportunity to begin undergraduate study online, including through open-entry and alternative-entry pathways (Stone, O'Shea, May, Delahunty, & Partington, 2016). However, retention in online undergraduate programs has been shown to be at least 20% lower than in face-to-face programs (Greenland & Moore, 2014) with an Australian Government Department of Education and Training report (DET, 2017) finding that only 46.6% of fully external, online students, compared with 76.6% of on-campus, face-to-face students, completed their undergraduate degrees over a 9-year period.

In 2016, an Equity Fellowship offered by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) resulted in the development of National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning (Stone, 2017). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 151 members of academic and professional staff across 16 higher education institutions - 15 in Australia plus the Open University UK - to seek their combined wisdom on ways to improve online student retention and success. The interviews investigated the types of practices, supports and retention strategies being developed and implemented within these institutions, by academic and professional staff, with the aim of improving student retention and academic success.

From analysis of the interview data and other related published research, seven key findings emerged.

- 1. A strategic whole-of-institution approach is required; one that recognises online education as 'core business'. This approach needs to include an institution-wide understanding of the nature and diversity of the online student cohort as well as the development and implementation of quality standards for online education, which undergo continuous quality improvement.*
- 2. Early intervention with students to connect, prepare and engage is essential; particularly in terms of providing realistic expectations and encouraging and facilitating academic preparation.*
- 3. 'Teacher-presence' plays a vital role in building a sense of belonging to the learning community and in improving student retention; however the time-consuming nature of developing and maintaining a strong sense of 'teacher-presence' is not always recognised in existing workload models.*
- 4. Content, curriculum and delivery need to be designed specifically for online learning;*

they need to be engaging, interactive, supportive and designed to strengthen interaction amongst students.

*5. Regular and structured contact between the institution and the student is important in providing connection and direction along the student journey.* This includes proactively reaching out to students at particular points along their journey, and is best achieved through the development of an institutional framework of interventions.

*6. Learning analytics play an important role in informing appropriate and effective student interventions,* including through predictive modelling and personalising the learning experience.

*7. Collaboration across the institution is required to integrate and embed support; delivering it to students at point of need.* When academic and professional staff cross traditional boundaries to work more closely together, a more holistic student experience can be delivered, including embedding support within curriculum.

These seven findings have informed the development of a set of 10 National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning, as outlined below. These are designed to inform institutions about ways to improve student outcomes primarily in undergraduate online education, where there tends to be a considerable diversity of the student cohort; this includes students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at university, as well as those with little prior experience of academic study and/or online study. The Guidelines are likely to be at least in part transferable to other online post-secondary education settings particularly where there is a similar diversity of student cohort.

### **National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning**

Listed below are 10 National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning, particularly in terms of retention and course completion rates. Included are practical examples for institutions of how each guideline can be translated into action. These examples are intended to provide a snapshot of what implementation of the Guidelines could look like. At times they represent actual examples of practice in one or more of the institutions which participated in the research, while at other times they are composites of examples from institutions and/or literature.

Examples of resources derived from the interview data and related publications are included beneath each guideline to provide more ideas from which to further explore and investigate possibilities for implementation.

#### ***1. Know who the students are***

Only by having comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the diversity of the online student cohort within an institution can the students' needs be met in the most appropriate and effective ways. The external, online cohort is generally quite different demographically from the on-campus cohort, yet many universities do not routinely analyse or distribute data that is specific to this cohort. Gaining an accurate institutional understanding of who these students are, means that decisions about and interactions with these students can be better informed. This understanding assists the development of appropriate support, teaching and communication strategies, including flexibility of approach to reduce barriers wherever possible.

#### ***Translating into action:***

An institution routinely collects data specific to the online student cohort, which is available to staff as required. This includes: de-identified demographic information about specific online student

cohorts and the online cohort as a whole, including age, gender, equity-status and other demographics collected any other available data such as student satisfaction reports.

Student information:

- is readily accessible via the learning platform dashboard and staff intranet
- is presented in ways that are easy to understand (e.g. pie charts)
- can be further interrogated for more detailed information.

Data and analytics staff are:

- available for further advice
- allocated to work with specific areas of the university, such as faculties, schools, divisions and services.

Teamwork and collaboration is central to:

- planning inclusive teaching, interventions and other strategies for online students
- developing a learning analytics strategy (see Guideline 9) to gain a deeper understanding of the
- individual needs of the students.

*More ideas:*

- *Scholarly insight 2016: a data wrangler perspective.* Open University UK (Rienties et al., 2016).
- *Access and Barriers to Online Education for People with Disabilities.* (Kent, 2015).

## ***2. Develop, implement and regularly review institution-wide quality standards for delivery of online education***

Quality online education needs to be viewed as central to the institution's core business. Quality standards for online teaching, learning design and student support need to be developed and clearly articulated at a senior institutional level; these standards need to include staff development and training, to ensure consistency of quality across all areas, as well as being subject to regular review via a continuous quality improvement framework, to ensure that they are updated and improved over time.

*Translating into action:*

An institution-wide, senior-level approach is taken to the development of these standards, which includes:

- close consultation with experts and relevant stakeholders within the institution
- the use of other research evidence
- appointment of strategy leaders or 'champions' at executive, faculty, school and division levels of the institution, to take responsibility for and oversee the development, dissemination, implementation and continuous quality improvement of the standards
- standards are embedded within the institutional strategic plan.

*More ideas:*

- *Standards for Online Education* (Parsell, 2014).
- *Quality and Standards Fact Sheets* (The Open University UK, 2017).

### **3. Intervene early to address student expectations, build skills and engagement**

Early contact and interventions with students, both pre- and post-enrolment enable an institution to: explore student expectations; provide a realistic picture of online study; facilitate appropriate academic preparation; improve early engagement; and build a sense of belonging to a learning community.

*Translating into action:*

An institution informs and advises prospective students through clear information on its website, including:

- contact information for those wishing to speak with a prospective student advisor
- quizzes and games to help students understand what to expect of online learning
- ‘readiness’ questions to encourage adequate academic preparation
- information on the most appropriate academic preparation and how to enrol.

Prospective student advisors are well-trained and knowledgeable about the demands and realities of online learning, including support available and how this can be accessed. Free, online academic preparation is available and recommended via prospective student advisors and through the website, particularly to students new to university or to online study. The institution makes personal contact with new online students, via a range of media such as telephone, email and messaging to welcome and encourage participation in orientation activities and to refer to help or support as required. Different approaches and touch points are utilised, such as:

- connecting new online students with those more experienced through peer mentoring programs
- linking online students with a student advisor as their personal contact
- orientation activities, online and face-to-face, offered at different times in different ways
- outreach orientation activities delivered off-campus at locations where distance students and their families are likely to be able to attend.

*More ideas:*

- *Charles Sturt University’s Outreach Team* <https://www.csu.edu.au/office-for-students/our-teams/engagement/outreach-team>
- *Open-entry, online academic skills support* (Academic Survival Skills, UON; Start for Success, OUA)
- Free online preparatory units (*OUA PREP Units* <https://www.open.edu.au/courses/preparatory/preparatory-units>)
- Minhas-Taneja, V. (2017). Interactive online student transition to university. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 49(2017).

#### **4. Explicitly value and support the vital role of ‘teacher-presence’**

Online teachers are absolutely crucial in building teacher-student and student-student relationships. A strong teacher-presence provides online students with a sense of belonging, helping them to feel connected to a community of learning and increasing their likelihood of persisting.

##### *Translating into action:*

Within the institution’s quality standards (as discussed in Guideline 2), the role of teacher-presence is explicitly recognised and valued. It is also included in institutional resource planning for online education (as discussed in Guideline 10). Online teachers are trained, supported and resourced to create an obvious, supportive, encouraging and professional presence within their online classroom. Sufficient teaching time and appropriate technology is allocated to enable them to provide an interactive, co- created learning experience that eases the isolation of online study and helps students feel connected with the teacher, their fellow students and with the class as a whole.

Examples include:

- welcoming students through personal introductions
- being responsive on discussion boards
- providing timely and detailed feedback
- encouraging deep learning through inclusive and relevant learning activities and assessments
- generating peer interaction over learning tasks
- making appropriate use of learning tools
- assisting with problems
- referring to the correct support.

##### *More ideas:*

- *Let students know you’re there: Designing online for maximising teacher presence: Higher Education Faculties and the Office of Learning and Teaching.* (Charles Darwin University, 2015)
- Signor, L., & Moore, C. (2014). Open Access in Higher Education – Strategies for Engaging Diverse Student Cohorts. *Open Praxis*, 6(3), 305-313.

#### **5. Design for online**

Education delivery needs to be designed for online first and foremost. In addition to the growing numbers of fully online students, blended learning for on-campus students is now the norm. Online technology provides multiple ways to access learning and undertake tasks, creating an inclusive learning space for all students.

##### *Translating into action:*

An institution adheres to quality standards for online learning design, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all students. There is a consistent and intuitive structure to the learning platform across different faculties, schools and disciplines. Content is designed to encourage online engagement and interactivity, such as:

- purpose-made short videos with captions
- tasks that encourage communication and collaboration
- use of online tools to provide synchronous and asynchronous activities
- information presented in multiple ways
- the ability for students to move at their own pace
- assessments designed using a mixture of approaches, relevant and relatable to the learning content.
- The cultural mix of the student cohort is considered in the design of content, tasks, assessments and mode of delivery, to ensure relevancy and inclusiveness, as are the needs of students with disability, poor internet access and those who may be incarcerated. A teamwork approach to design sees learning designers and academics working collaboratively to ensure compatibility and accessibility of curriculum, content and delivery. Continuous improvement is emphasised, with quality reviews regularly conducted across all courses.

*More ideas:*

- Online Learning Insights: <https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/resources-for-course-designers/>
- Canty, A. J., Goldberg, L. R., Ziebell, J. M., & Ceperkovic, H. (2015). Meeting the Challenge of designing and delivering an entry level unit of study to engage and inspire learners in online neuroscience education in a Bachelor of Dementia Care. *Paper presented at the ICERI Proceedings*, 18-20 November, Seville, Spain. <http://ecite.utas.edu.au/106511>

## **6. Engage and support through content and delivery**

‘Interactive’, ‘connected’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘relevant’ are all essential criteria for online learning content and teaching strategies, using a range of appropriate technologies, both synchronous and asynchronous, that are specific to online delivery. The flexible nature of online delivery and the time-pressures experienced by high numbers of online students means that asynchronous delivery and interactivity is particularly important in ensuring that all students can participate.

*Translating into action:*

The institution’s quality standards for teaching and delivery of online education (see Guideline 2) specifically include the importance of delivering engaging and supportive curriculum and content. Teachers and curriculum developers receive ongoing and regularly updated training and staff development. Sessional staff receive paid training time to attend. Teaching staff are kept up-to-date with practical resources and guides that are incorporated in training. Students are engaged and supported through:

- a variety of engaging and relevant content, activities and assessments
- a mixture of approaches and different technologies
- timely, constructive and specific feedback
- opportunity and encouragement to communicate and collaborate through synchronous and asynchronous discussion forums and collaborative tasks
- encouragement of informal peer support opportunities (e.g. social media).

*More ideas:*

- *6 principles of online teaching* (Charles Darwin University, 2017)
- Devlin, M., & McKay, J. (2016). Teaching students using technology: Facilitating success for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds in Australian universities. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 32(1), 92-106.
- Verenikina, I., Jones, P. T., & Delahunty, J. (2017). *The Guide to Fostering Asynchronous Online Discussion in Higher Education*.

### **7. Build collaboration across campus to offer holistic, integrated and embedded student support**

Strong collaboration is required across the academic and professional areas of universities to provide holistic and integrated support to online students. Through this collaboration, support is embedded within the curriculum as much as possible, hence delivering it where and when it is most needed.

*Translating into action:*

Academic and professional staff collaborate to embed support into the curriculum at point of need, including academic skills and technology support. Student advisors, IT staff, learning skills staff and library staff are attached to schools and discipline areas, creating teams of academic and professional staff working together within discipline or curriculum areas to provide teaching and support that is linked, relevant and provided at the point of need. This includes:

- opportunities to practise academic skills embedded within beginning units/modules
- early assessment tasks designed to assist students develop academic literacy skills and understand academic expectations
- additional optional online workshops and resources made available and encouraged
- support services easily accessed remotely through a variety of technologies including telephone, email, messaging, live chat, synchronous and asynchronous audio and video
- academic staff knowledgeable about support services and referring students appropriately
- support services are easily locatable via the learning platform; also embedded in course content at relevant points in curriculum
- extended/after-hours' support available to students at times they are more likely to be studying.

*More ideas:*

- Slade, S., & Prinsloo, P. (2015). Stemming the flow: improving retention for distance learning students. Paper presented at the *EDEN 2015 Annual Conference*.
- *Helping online students succeed* (Stone, 2013)

### **8. Contact and communicate throughout the student journey**

Across the wider institution, the establishment of regular contact points when the institution reaches out to students to provide information, offer support and increase engagement have a demonstrated impact on retention and academic success of online students.

*Translating into action:*

An institution develops an online student intervention strategy, informed by learning analytics (see

Guideline 9) and implemented collaboratively between academic, support and data analysis staff. A comprehensive institutional framework of interventions is developed, which includes:

- personalised messages, through synchronous and asynchronous technologies, scheduled at particular times and targeted towards particular students or cohorts
- students are regularly and clearly advised about crucial dates and what these mean, including the last date for withdrawal from study before fees are due (census date)
- each student receives only those messages that are relevant for them
- messages are personalised based on a student's activity and behaviour, and tailored to their needs in real time.

Both academic and professional staff are involved in the student intervention strategy ensuring that students are contacted at the most relevant time by the most relevant member of staff. This approach, combined with the personalisation of messages made possible by information from learning analytics, tells the student that the university knows who they are, is interested in them as an individual (see Guideline 1) and is actively seeking to provide them with relevant and timely support.

*More ideas:*

- *MILLS Framework*. Open University UK (Slade & Prinsloo, 2015)
- Nelson, K., & Creagh, T. (2012). *Case Study 7: University of New England (UNE) Early Alert Program*

### **9. Use learning analytics to target and personalise student interventions**

Data from the institution's systems provides information on online activity of students, which can be constructively harnessed to inform the development, personalisation and appropriate targeting of interventions to help students persist and succeed with their studies.

*Translating into action:*

An institution uses data from its internal online systems to inform interventions based on student activity and behaviour. From this data, the institution:

- builds a predictive model to target interventions towards those most likely to need them
- personalises the interventions, including tailoring content and learning activities more specifically for
- individual students based on their learning engagement and achievements
- takes a collaborative approach towards the development of a learning analytics strategy
- consults widely with academic and support staff in deciding what to ask of the data and how to make the best use of the answers
- makes available information, advice and support to staff working with students across all areas of the university to engage and involve them with the process.

*More ideas:*

- *Horizon Report*: (Johnson et al., 2016)
- *JISC Report*: (Sclater, Peasgood, & Mullan, 2016)

### ***10. Invest in online education to ensure access and opportunity***

In order to successfully implement the strategies discussed in each of the points above, the delivery of online education needs to be viewed as core business and invested in accordingly, by committing to it a level of priority and resourcing equitable with on-campus education. This investment and commitment, when clearly voiced and actioned at an institutional level, will dispel the notion of its being ‘secondary education’ and instead will create an environment in which online students have greater opportunities to persist with and complete their studies.

#### *Translating into action:*

An institution recognises that investment in engagement and support of online students leads to improved retention and completion. This is demonstrated by such means as:

- online teaching recognised appropriately in the academic workload model
- consultation with experienced academic staff, including sessional teaching staff, to set benchmarks for realistic online class sizes and paid hours required for effective teaching and support
- programs that improve online student engagement, satisfaction, retention and/or academic success receive dedicated, ongoing funding
- investment made in technology improvements, including learning platforms, learning design, learning tools and data analytics to deliver an engaging and positive online student experience

#### *More ideas:*

- Standards for Online Education (Parsell, 2014)
- Salmon, G. (2014). Learning Innovation: A Framework for Transformation. *European Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 17(2), 219-235

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**The author may be contacted via**

Cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au

## Trigger Warnings: Caring or Coddling

Helen M. Stallman  
School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy  
University of South Australia  
International Association for University Student Health and Wellbeing

Diann S. Eley  
Faculty of Medicine  
The University of Queensland  
International Association for University Student Health and Wellbeing

Amanda D. Hutchinson  
School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy  
University of South Australia

### Abstract

*Trigger warnings are proposed as a strategy to keep university students safe from potentially distressing material. While used internationally for several years, they have begun to be formally implemented in some Australian universities. This paper provides a critical review of the underlying theoretical premises of trigger warnings and the personal and professional impact of such warnings for students in health professions. As with most short-term avoidance strategies, trigger warnings are likely to have a negative impact on student mental health, rather than improve it. The warnings undermine the autonomy and self-management skills of students as independent, adult learners. If these warnings become more widespread, they have significant implications for the resilience of students. For students in health professions, who need skills to manage a wide-range of often unpleasant topics and provide responsive and competent treatment for their patients, they have the potential to result in adverse outcomes in patient care. The development of coping skills to flexibly self-manage and self-regulate emotions and behaviour is an important graduate attribute and provides an alternative to counterproductive trigger warnings.*

**Keywords:** coping, mental health, resilience, trigger warnings, wellbeing;

### Trigger warnings: Caring or coddling

Universities aim to provide a safe and healthy environment for their students, staff and visitors. However, some universities internationally and now in Australia (Palmer 2017), have taken this further to introduce trigger warnings into their policies and practices to provide a safe inclusive space for students (NOWSA 2017). A trigger warning is a statement at the start of a lecture, piece of writing, or resource alerting the audience that it contains potentially distressing material. These include courses where there may be discussion of sexual assault, violence, domestic abuse, child abuse, eating disorders, self-harm, suicide, pornography, abortion, kidnapping, hate speech, animal cruelty, animal deaths, or abattoirs. The more extensive list of the Network of Women Students Australia (NOWSA 2017) suggests that some adult learners cannot cope without prior warning of: classism, corpses, skulls or skeletons, drug use or talk of drugs (legal, illegal or psychiatric), eye contact, food, gore, insects, medical procedures, mental illness, needles, panic attacks, pregnancy, slimy things, snakes, spiders, trichotillomania, vomit, warfare or weapons. The aim of this commentary is to highlight the implications of such warnings for students in health profession programs.

The experience of a wide-range of emotions is part of being human — from distress through to euphoria. Emotions are not triggered by external events, but by an individual's thoughts about those events (Beck 2002). These in turn are influenced by a person's psychosocial history. Humans develop coping skills to manage their psychological and social environments. Some are healthy; such as coping self-talk, exercising, talking to a trusted friend or family member, or a health

professional; some are unhealthy such as eating, drinking alcohol, or social withdrawal (Stallman and Wilson 2017). In the case of anxiety, without an actual threat, flight or fight is an unhealthy strategy (e.g. Boyes 2015).

Trigger warnings are likely to increase anxiety rather than promote coping and resilience, because they send a message to all students that the environment needs to protect them because they cannot cope independently. It suggests students need warnings of potentially unpleasant material because students do not have the coping skills to manage the unexpectedness that happens in life or even in a considered environment such as a university course they enrolled in. Trigger warnings, by definition, suggest that students need to be explicitly warned of content because the students: 1) cannot select programs of study based on their individual strengths and vulnerabilities; 2) are unable to anticipate the types of content that may be covered within a course, based on the program they have chosen to study; 3) they have inadequate coping skills and may therefore be harmed by exposure to course content; and 4) they need to avoid exposure to unpleasant things or something catastrophic may happen.

Some people who experience traumatic experiences go on to develop a range of psychopathology, including depressive and anxiety illnesses. It is important that these people receive treatment to help them overcome or at least manage their symptoms (National Institute of Clinical Excellence 2005). Left untreated, these illnesses can result in increased unhealthy avoidance and social withdrawal that can perpetuate or exacerbate symptoms, rather than help people manage their illnesses. Students who are unable to implement healthy coping strategies independently should work with a mental health professional to help them decide what activities they are able to do — this may include not enrolling in particular programs or courses while they are unwell.

In contrast, universities provide a learning environment for adult education. At this tertiary level of education, it is presumed that students have sufficient personal coping strategies to effectively interact with a diversity of people, learn content relevant to the program of study they choose to enrol in, and tolerate diverse and often contradictory opinions of others. Indeed, university is an optimal environment to be confronted, be uncomfortable, and grow by thinking about topics in a new way. To safeguard those students who may not cope well with these situations, most universities provide free counselling, disability, and General Practice services for individual support. This approach is consistent with promoting student autonomy and self-efficacy by giving students the responsibility to: 1) choose the timing of their studies after taking into account competing priorities in their life; 2) engage in studies that are consistent with their strengths and vulnerabilities, including current known mental illnesses; and 3) cope. Adult education recognises the ability of students to regulate their own emotions, and to choose if, and when, to seek additional support without impeding autonomy by coddling.

If these triggers warnings become more widespread, they have serious implications for students in health professions who are likely exposed to many of these ‘trigger’ topics in the course of their studies and work with unwell people. While an Arts student who seeks to be protected from literature they find uncomfortable will only narrow their individual learning, the student in a health program who seeks to be protected from any potentially distressing content will be ill-prepared to respond flexibly and with empathy and confidence to situations they may encounter as a health professional. This is likely to impact patient care and has the potential for adverse patient outcomes.

Resilience develops from experiencing distress, coping with it, and learning from the experience. Warning students about exposure to potentially distressing material may prevent them from engaging with unpleasant material and from successfully managing their distress. The nature of the practice of health professions means that training will be full of confronting and often unpleasant

concepts, situations, and experiences. Coping with challenges flexibly is a vital skill for health professionals—as important as their ability to problem-solve, think critically, and engage in competent and professional practice. Engagement with challenging material is likely to benefit the student and their future patients (Heath, Due et al. 2017) through the development of resilience, responsibility, and resolve (Eley and Stallman 2014). The University, with its support services, is the ideal setting for this autonomous learning and emotional regulation to occur. In contrast to trigger warnings, it has been suggested that teaching coping planning to students will better prepare them for life as a professional and in general (Stallman and Wilson 2017). It is important to promote university student mental health (Stallman 2010). The solution to improving mental health, however, is not to coddle students further, but to encourage and support their coping skills and resilience (Stallman and Wilson 2017).

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**The authors may be contacted via**  
helen.stallman@unisa.edu.au

## JANZSSA Submission Guidelines 2018

Manuscripts for submission to JANZSSA must be submitted electronically at <https://janzssa.scholasticahq.com/for-authors>

JANZSSA publishes *Refereed* (peer-reviewed by double-blind process) and *Professional* papers; which are reviewed by the Editor/s of JANZSSA to ensure their suitability for publication. Within the Professional category are included full-length papers as well as shorter *Best Practice Case Examples, Book Reviews, Reports and Conversation Pieces*.

### Word Processing platform

All articles should be submitted electronically using Microsoft Word or in another commonly used word processing format able to be converted to an MS Word document.

### Language and spelling

JANZSSA uses Australian English so please adjust your spell check in Word to ensure compliance.

### Journal format

JANZSSA is published online at <https://janzssa.scholasticahq.com/issues> with full pdf versions of each edition also stored at <http://anzssa.com/Public/JANZSSA/Public/JANZSSA/JANZSSA.aspx>

### Article Length:

Manuscripts would normally be fewer than 6,000 words to be accepted.

Manuscripts longer than 6,000 words may be returned to authors to be shortened.

### Abstract is required:

All manuscripts submitted must include a brief (<250 words) abstract.

### Page layout required:

Articles for inclusion in JANZSSA in either the referred or non-refereed sections need to be submitted electronically using the following layout instructions.

The following is a normal page layout in MS Word:

|            |                          |
|------------|--------------------------|
| Top: 5.5   | Bottom: 5.5              |
| Left: 2.54 | Right: 2.54              |
| Gutter = 0 | Header = 1    Footer = 6 |

### Font type:

Times New Roman

### Font pitch:

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Manuscript Title:                 | 14 point <b>BOLD</b>    |
| Author/s Name, Role, Institution: | 12 point                |
| Abstract header:                  | 12 point <b>BOLD</b>    |
| Abstract body:                    | 10 point <i>italics</i> |
| Body text:                        | 12 point                |
| Header within body of the text:   | 12 point <b>BOLD</b>    |
| Footnotes:                        | 9 point                 |

### Diagrams tables and drawings:

Any diagrams and tables included in the text must be no larger than 21 cm in depth x 17 cms wide.

Any drawings included are inserted with **Paste Special** function so that the drawing is stable in the body of the text.

Text within a table is preferred as centred or left margin aligned.

### **Use of references:**

Referencing protocol is the APA Referencing System. Examples of the APA Referencing system are easily found using an internet search. Below are two examples from Australian Universities.

<https://student.unsw.edu.au/american-psychological-association-apa-referencing-system>

<http://libguides.murdoch.edu.au/APA>

### **Suitable content for articles submitted for publication in JANZSSA:**

Manuscripts may include comment and debate on current issues, reports of student services in practice, policy matters, research projects, and reviews of relevant books. The guiding editorial policy is that manuscripts are of interest to student service staff, and are of a high standard.

### **JANZSSA publishes both Refereed and Professional papers:**

Authors who wish to submit an item to be published as a refereed article must include a written note to that effect at the time of submission. If an author does not specify for inclusion in the refereed section the editors will consider the article for publication in the professional section.

### **Refereed (double-blind peer reviewed) Manuscripts:**

JANZSSA uses a double-blind peer review process for refereed articles. The editor of JANZSSA will consult with the Editorial Board to identify at least two expert referees (who may not necessarily be members of ANZSSA). Each referee will be unaware of the identity of the other referee/s. Each of the referees will be provided with an electronic copy of the article from which the author's name has been removed.

As author/s you should also remove other identifying information, and replace any such words or sentence with "words removed for purposes of author anonymity" so that you are not identifiable as the author/s once the author names have been removed.

Referees will submit a report back to the editor that contains one of three recommendations. These are:

1. That the manuscript be accepted (usually with minor amendments to be approved by the Editor/s of JANZSSA).
2. That the manuscript be revised and re-submitted with major amendments to be approved by the reviewers
3. That the manuscript not be accepted for the refereed section. (Reviewers may choose to recommend that it be accepted as a professional paper, with or without amendments)

At least two referees must be in agreement for an manuscript to be published as a refereed paper.

### **Professional manuscripts:**

Manuscripts submitted for publication without being peer-refereed will be published at the discretion of the editors. Authors may be asked to make amendments to the manuscript prior to publication.

### **Best practice case examples to showcase:**

JANZSSA includes in its non-refereed section examples of best practice and innovation emerging in Student Services.

Contributions to this section would normally be descriptive and not evaluative.

Length of submissions can vary but contributions will normally be between 1,000 and 2,000 words (approximately). Contributions of longer length may be returned to the author for editing or considered as Professional manuscripts.

A Showcase Best Practice Report Template is available from the Editors. See contact details below. Use of the template is not compulsory and is offered simply to assist if required.

### **Reports, Reviews and Conversation Pieces:**

Reports and discussion pieces on aspects of policy and practice within Student Services and the Post-Secondary Education sector are invited. Short reviews of books, articles, journals, reports which would be of general interest to JANZSSA readers are also very welcome.

### **Quality submissions:**

All submissions for publication are required to comply with the layout requirements, and edited for grammar, punctuation and spelling accuracy prior to submission to the JANZSSA co-editors. Manuscripts will be returned to authors for corrections, if required, prior to consideration for publication or distributed for peer review.

### **Submission deadlines:**

JANZSSA publishes issues in April and October each year.

***Deadline for submission of professional manuscripts, reports or reviews, and contributions to the section, Best Practice Case Examples:***

- January 31 for the April issue
- July 31 for the October issue.

***Deadline for submission of refereed manuscripts:***

- October 30 for the April issue
- April 30 for the October issue.

### **Enquiries:**

Any queries regarding submission format should be directed to either of the co-editors. See contact details below.

### **JANZSSA Co-editors**

Annie Andrews  
a. andrews@unsw.edu.au

Cathy Stone  
cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au

### **Before submitting your manuscript:**

Please refer to the following check list and complete these actions prior to submission of the manuscript.

#### ***Please check:***

- JANZSSA page layout has been used
- JANZSSA font type and font size requirements have been used
- JANZSSA referencing system (APA style) has been used throughout and that all references are included in full.
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation reviewed.
- All diagram and table contents are position and text correct (i. e. text abbreviations used are consistent throughout diagram or table and that text is centred or left margin aligned.).

- Drawings included are inserted with Paste Special function so that the drawing is stable in the text.
- Do print and read for final corrections.
- De-identified version of paper as reviewer copy completed and attached (if the manuscript is for submission for the refereed section of JANZSSA).

**The editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the following people in the production of JANZSSA:**

**JANZSSA Copy Editor**

Ruth McHugh [ruth@squidder.com](mailto:ruth@squidder.com)

**JANZSSA Assistant Editors**

Kelly Atherton [Kelly.Atherton@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Kelly.Atherton@vuw.ac.nz)

Jan Stewart [Jan.Stewart@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Jan.Stewart@vuw.ac.nz)

Cheryl Brugman [c.brugman@uq.edu.au](mailto:c.brugman@uq.edu.au)

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|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
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| <p><b>Heads of Counselling (Australia)</b><br/>                 Jeremy Cass<br/>                 Manager, RMIT Counselling Service<br/>                 RMIT University City Campus Bldg 74<br/>                 G.P.O. Box 2476V<br/>                 Melbourne 3001<br/><br/>                 +61 3 9925 4365<br/>                 jeremy.cass@rmit.edu.au</p>   | <p><b>Heads of Counselling (New Zealand)</b><br/>                 Gerard Hoffman<br/>                 Manager, Student Counselling Service<br/>                 Victoria University of Wellington<br/><br/>                 gerard.hoffman@vuw.ac.nz</p>  | <p><b>Student Financial Advisors Network</b><br/>                 Stuart Martin<br/>                 Student Welfare Officer<br/>                 Victoria University<br/><br/>                 +61 3 9919 4180<br/>                 stuart.martin@vu.edu.au</p>  |

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The Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association provides development opportunities and sector representation for professional staff working in post secondary student engagement, student participation, student wellbeing and student development throughout Australia and New Zealand. Through meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences, experienced practitioners share information, ideas and research within their areas of expertise.

ANZSSA is focused on:

- The quality of the student experience
- Supporting and empowering students to achieve their educational and life goals
- Enhancing student wellbeing and development
- Improving student success and persistence
- Providing outreach to students at-risk
- Raising institutional student retention rates

### Membership

Whilst ANZSSA is based in Australia and New Zealand, anyone is welcome to join us, no matter where you may be located. Full details of current membership categories and registration costs are available via the ANZSSA website members' page at [www.anzssa.com](http://www.anzssa.com)

Belonging to ANZSSA will connect you to a community of professionals across many institutions and support areas – including:

First year experience and transition services - Mentor programs - Counselling - Learning support - Careers - Academic advisors - Health services - Student advisors - Disability support - Welfare advisors - Housing services - Recreation services - Student guild advocates - International offices - Grievance/Conflict Resolution officers - Chaplaincy and other faith officers --Equity staff - Financial advisers - Volunteer and leadership program coordinators - Directors and Heads of operational areas.

### Professional Development and Communication Activities

The ANZSSA Annual Conference attracts international participants as well as delegates from across Australia and New Zealand and internationally. The 2017 Conference will be held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, from 5-8 December. Further information at <http://www.isana-anzssa.com/>

Regional and State meetings range from informal workshops to visiting speakers and annual conferences.

Information about how to join and subscribe to the ANZSSA members' mailing list (listserv) is at <http://lists.vuw.ac.nz/mailman/listinfo/anzssa> while information about joining Professional Focus Groups and Regional Groups is located on the ANZSSA web site at [www.anzssa.com](http://www.anzssa.com)

These provide opportunities for members to share information and collaborate on programs and issues.

### Publications

JANZSSA, the Journal of ANZSSA, is published online twice per year with further information available at <https://janzssa.scholasticahq.com/> and on the ANZSSA website at <http://anzssa.com/Public/JANZSSA/Public/JANZSSA/JANZSSA.aspx>

A monthly newsletter is published and emailed to all members; also available on the ANZSSA website at

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