



University of
South Australia

University of South Australia submission on the *Improving retention, completion and success in high education* discussion paper

Thursday 6 July 2017

Overview

Overall, the University of South Australia (UniSA) supports the analysis outlined in the Discussion Paper. The results obtained align with the findings of similar analyses undertaken by UniSA, which signal that student retention rates are highest among full-time students, enrolled in internal/on-campus programs. Similarly, the University has observed greater attrition for programs that have relatively low ATARs, and where there are perceived to be lower barriers to entry for the program (and thus re-enrolling at a later date, following withdrawal). Our analysis has found little correlation between a student's mode of admission, or socio-economic status, and retention. Equally, in line with findings of research studies into student retention, the University has observed that external factors, such as the changing economy, and individual financial, social, family and extra-curricular commitments for students, impact strongly on the University's overall attrition.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is acknowledged that the quality of the overall learning experience, including curriculum design, teacher quality, communications and engagement with students, learning resources and facilities all impact on the University's retention of students.

On an annual basis the Provost & Chief Academic Officer reviews the performance of each school in the University as part of the **Curriculum Innovation Process**. This process involves examining a data suite for each school, reviewing every program and course, in conjunction with the senior staff of the school and division, including:

- Students' course satisfaction (curriculum design)
- Students' teacher satisfaction (teaching quality)
- Commencing and continuing student retention
- Student completions
- Course grade distributions
- Grade Point Average (GPA) data in programs
- Graduate outcomes.

Reports are provided to each school following the review meeting, which feed into action plans within schools and divisions. Where student retention and overall success have been identified as an issue within a program, curriculum reform activities have been put in place to improve student outcomes, including:

- Creation of new courses and programs that better meet the needs of students
- Modifications to existing curriculum, including changing assessment design or course delivery modes
- Early communication of the value of the program to students (and links to industry/careers), and in some cases, new opportunities for students to obtain practical/work experience
- Development programs for academic teaching staff
- Investments in teaching facilities and equipment.



The University's Business Intelligence and Planning (BIP) Unit also regularly evaluates the performance of our students, taking into consideration their basis of admission. BIP also evaluates performance against equity indicators and then reports on these at a Federal level so that a number of supports specifically for equity students can be implemented (eg. Disability Advisors, regional scholarships etc). Importantly, the relationship between students' ATARs upon admission, is evaluated in conjunction with their grade point average, by program, to evaluate student success. This data is considered in setting the entry requirements for our programs, to ensure that our students are suitably prepared to succeed in their program of study.

Strategies and initiatives

A number of strategies and initiatives are employed across the University, facilitated by our key central student services units, as well as local area activities within our schools, that are aimed at retaining students and facilitating student success.

1. Flexible study options

To better cater to the diverse needs of students the University, like many other universities, is responding by making available more opportunities for students to study flexibly. This includes offering:

- Full-time and part-time study options
- On-campus, mixed mode and online programs
- Multiple study periods (including summer and winter schools)
- Intensive courses.

2. Learning analytics

The University makes available a suite of dashboards – including student-facing and staff-facing dashboards – that draw on sophisticated learning analytics, which are obtained through the University's learning management system. Academic staff use the dashboards as a means of identifying students who are considered to be academically 'at risk' early in a course, or within a program. The analytics can help staff to recognise where there are individual students who are consistently not accessing the system, or not engaging with the course learning materials, or where a student's pattern of engagement has varied over a course. This enables tailored support to be put in place to enhance students' success, with communications with students captured in the University's customer relationship management system.

3. Proactive student engagement

The University is committed to setting students up to succeed, and as such a priority for the University is in delivering an orientation experience that introduces students to the academic and non-academic elements of studying at UniSA, through presentations and social activities across the University's campuses. This is supplemented by high-quality online induction resources, including new online orientation modules.

Local-level strategies are employed by schools to attempt to proactively re-connect with students who have not been engaging. This may include current students or staff emailing, or making calls, to the following groups of students:

- Students with a program enrolment, and no course enrolment
- Students who have deferred and have not enrolled
- Students who have taken a leave of absence and have not enrolled
- Students who have consistently failed a particular course.



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A number of strategies are employed to support students who are found to not be engaging, such as:

- Participating in a peer-to-peer mentoring program
- Reducing their study load
- Transferring to an alternate academic program
- Taking a leave of absence from a program
- Encouraging students to graduate with an exit award (if other options are not appropriate and/or the student no longer wishes to continue studying).

4. Extended-hours support services

Increasingly academic, wellbeing and other supporting resources and services for students are being provided online, such that students can access help when and where they require. The University is investing in making available a number of key services over extended hours (at evenings and on weekends), including: counselling, disability services, academic and learning skills, careers advice and more. All of these learning and wellbeing services are designed to provide tailored, individualised supports to enable student success.

There are also tailored support services available for specific cohorts of students – for example Wurringka Student Services that provides tutorial and other supports for Aboriginal students at UniSA from enrolment through to graduation, and out of hours learning and tutoring services for students studying online or based in regional areas.