

CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

STAR 2011-2013 REPORT

**EVALUATION OF THE STUDENT TRANSITION
AND RETENTION (STAR) PROGRAM IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

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Authors:

Barney Dalgarno (Associate Dean Curriculum Learning and Teaching)
Liam Downing (STAR Support)
Georgina Sanger (STAR Academic Lead)
Roy Crotty (STAR Academic Lead)
Celia Hilman (STAR Academic Lead)

Inquiries to:

Barney Dalgarno

bdalgarno@csu.edu.au

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Overview of the STAR program in the Faculty of Education

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) was established by the commonwealth government to provide funding to universities to increase participation of students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds. Part of the CSU allocation of HEPPP funding was utilised to support the Student Transition and Retention (STAR) program. The STAR program was intended to provide an integrated approach to student transition and retention initiatives across the university.

There were four courses identified as focus courses for the STAR program in the Faculty of Education. Initially the Bachelor of Education – Primary (BEd(Pri)) and the Bachelor of Information Studies (BIS) were indentified and these were the focus courses for the first year of the program in 2011. Subsequently, late in 2011 two additional courses, the Bachelor of Exercise Science (BExSci) and the Bachelor of Education - Birth to 5 (BEd(B-5)) were added. Each course was chosen based on the Socio Economic Status (SES) makeup of its students and its record on retention. These courses have traditionally had a collective annual intake of 800 to 900 students. For example, in 2013, 194 students commenced the BIS, 617 the BEd(B-5), 163 students commenced the BEd(Primary) and 59 students commenced the BExSci.

In each faculty, STAR academic lead positions, each with a 50% fraction, were created for each of the four courses, and two full time STAR support positions were created to support the work of the academic leads. The members of the Faculty of Education STAR team were Georgina Sanger (Academic Lead for the Primary Education and Exercise Science courses from 2012), Roy Crotty (Academic Lead for the Information Studies course), Celia Hilman (Academic Lead for the Birth to 5 Education course from 2012) , Liam Downing (STAR Support from 2012), Chelsea Kovacs (STAR Support during 2011 and 2012), Rhonda Hoare (Academic Lead Primary Education Wagga during 2011), and Graham Daniels (Academic Lead Primary Education Bathurst during 2011).

The work of the STAR academic leads and STAR supports included contributions to student orientation in collaboration with Course Directors, communication with first year students, collaboration with academic staff and educational designers on changes to curriculum and assessment, collection of data as part of evaluation of initiatives and identification of students at risk, and development of resources. The work across the faculty was coordinated by the Sub Dean Learning and Teaching, while at the University level the Director of Academic Support coordinated the overall program.

Evaluation of the STAR program as a whole and the individual initiatives undertaken within specific courses led to a number of recommendations for the future. These recommendations have been presented in the sections in the main body of this report and have also been collected together in this Executive Summary. The numbering of recommendations corresponds with the order in which they appear in the main body and consequently they are not presented in numeric order here.

1.2 Recommendations emerging from work across the whole program

Many of the initiatives emerging from the program were by their very nature collaborative, with many of the subject focussed initiatives requiring cooperation between the STAR team and the Subject Coordinator. In most cases there was effective cooperation between STAR staff and other staff in the schools however in some cases the impact of the program was reduced due to a lack of cooperation or engagement by academic staff. Consequently, the following recommendation has emerged:

Recommendation 9. Future programs aimed at improving first year students' transition experiences should be accompanied by a rigorous system of accountability, engagement and support.

In some courses it was difficult to implement changes to curriculum or assessment and difficult to provide support to students due to the fact that subjects were taught by sessional staff with limited availability or limited contract hours. This leads to the following recommendation:

Recommendation 25. Wherever possible continuing or contract academic staff members are allocated to convene or coordinate subjects in the first year of courses to ensure awareness of and cooperation with Faculty and course initiatives to support first year students.

In some cases a lack of engagement with the program by subject coordinators reflected a lack of awareness of the program or a lack of appreciation of first year curriculum principles. This leads to the following recommendation:

Recommendation 27. All new continuing, contract and sessional staff allocated to teach first year subjects be provided with professional development to ensure that they are aware of the needs of first year students and the transition and retention approaches being implemented in the Faculty, School or course.

Many of the initiatives emerging from the STAR program were effectively evaluated, however in many cases evaluation occurred after the fact and evaluation strategies were not always well planned. Data sources used for evaluation were often anecdotal rather than systematic. This leads to the following recommendation:

Recommendation 1. Future transition and retention programs should be evaluated in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

1.3 Main initiatives and emergent recommendations

On Campus Course Orientation

Additional transition activities were added to the normal course based orientation sessions during orientation week for commencing Exercise Science and Primary Education students. Student comments suggested that the o-week transition activities were well received by students, however orientation survey responses indicated that in general students found the course based orientation week activities to be boring and not all that helpful indicating that refinements are needed to the overall program.

A one hour per week transition/orientation session was scheduled across first semester for commencing Exercise Science students. Attendance and engagement at these weekly sessions was poor indicating that this initiative is of questionable value.

Recommendation 5: Orientation should focus on showing students what the reality of their university life will entail, rather than bombarding students with information which could be easily communicated on a ‘just in time’ basis.

Distance Education Course Orientation

The on campus residential school orientation program for BIS students, held on Wagga campus, was extended to include students starting in session 2. This was viewed positively by students as evidenced by attendance and orientation evaluation survey results.

Recommendation 10. The session 1 and 2 on campus residential orientation program for the BIS course continue and this type of orientation be considered for other distance courses in the Faculty.

Alongside the main orientation program in the BIS, meetings in capital cities early in the program have also been put in place, along with study visits at key points within the course. These have been found to be successful complements and follow ups to the initial orientation program

Recommendation 11. Meetings and study visits be scheduled in centres containing large numbers of distance students in a particular course to complement the main orientation programs.

Face to face orientation sessions in major centres (Sydney, Port Macquarie, Griffith, Parkes and Albury) were introduced for BEd(B-5) students commencing in session 1 or 2. The Sydney sessions were well attended (e.g. 97 students attended the session in 1st session 2013), however less than 10 students attended the sessions in regional centres. Evaluation responses were very positive for all sessions. Students who attended were less likely to withdraw from the course in the first year, with 16% who attended withdrawing and 24% of those not attending withdrawing within the first year of the course.

Recommendation 21. Sydney orientation sessions continue to be offered in Session 1 and 2 for commencing BEd(B-5) students and these types of sessions held in centres containing large numbers of students in a course be considered for other distance courses without an on campus orientation program.

To cater for students unable to attend these main sessions online orientation sessions including audio-visual material corresponding with presentations at the face to face orientation sessions have been produced. Although these need further refinement, they have been well received by students.

Recommendation 22. That online orientation sessions be provided in all distance courses without a compulsory on campus orientation program, ideally as synchronous sessions recorded for students unable to attend.

Communication with students

STAR academic leads regularly posted messages to students via email and via the Interact learning management system as well as facilitating synchronous chat sessions and online webinars. These communications included reminders about key subject milestones at various stages during the semester, links to support resources, reminders about subject resources to focus on and developmental activities focusing on key competencies such as academic writing. Evaluations suggested that the majority of students surveyed (78%) recalled receiving messages sent through email and Interact and on average found them to be moderately helpful (5.3 on a 10 point scale). Feedback in the form of unsolicited emails from students in relation to the online webinars and chat sessions was overwhelmingly positive.

Recommendation 8: While STAR communications have had good reach, effort should be made to find out how to best target these messages.

Initial trials of synchronous chat sessions and Adobe Connect synchronous audio visual meetings were undertaken and were well received by students. This strategy lines up well with the Faculty's online learning commitments and is particularly appropriate for first year subjects.

Recommendation 14. Consistent with the Faculty's online learning commitments, all first year distance subjects should include regular online synchronous sessions, and academic staff should be provided with support from educational designers and/or other staff to assist them in incorporating these sessions into their subjects.

Recommendation 26. Synchronous sessions introduced within subjects should be optional rather than compulsory and should be recorded or captured for later viewing/reading by students unable to attend.

The value of a welcome online session or a welcome video at the beginning of a session in first year distance subjects is particularly acknowledged.

Recommendation 29. Support be provided to subject coordinators in first year distance subjects to produce a welcome video either as a standalone resources or as a recorded synchronous session.

Early low stakes assessment

STAR academic leads worked with subject coordinators in 11 different subjects to introduce early low stakes assessment tasks consistent with first year curriculum principles. Early formative or low stakes assessment tasks can create an opportunity for formative feedback that is useful for subsequent tasks, can provide early notification for staff and students of skill/knowledge, can enable the possibility of early intervention, and can be an introduction to assessment that provides a chance 'to recover'. Such tasks might be low weighting summative tasks, formative tasks (which in some cases might make up part of a summative task to be submitted later), or higher weighted tasks which allow resubmission for students unable to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

In on campus courses feedback from staff and students through surveys was generally positive, suggesting that the early identification of student problems opened up a

dialog with the lecturer and helped students to improve the quality of their work in later assessment tasks. Some staff indicated in their survey responses that there is additional workload associated with setting and marking these tasks. In distance subjects an unintended consequence occurred where students who would have otherwise been able to withdraw early in the session without penalty ended up receiving a fail grade because of completion of the early task.

Recommendation 2: Early, low stakes assessment tasks should be incorporated into all first year on campus subjects in a manner that allows students to ease into the academic context.

Recommendation 23. Further trials of early low stakes assessment be undertaken in distance subjects but with caution to ensure that unintended consequences relating to student withdrawal or inability to withdraw do not occur.

Although trials involving the implementation of first year curriculum principles, such as early low stakes assessment have occurred across all Faculty courses within the STAR program, substantial work is still required to scrutinise the assessment design in all subjects. Additionally, the course changes occurring within the Faculty from the beginning of 2014 mean that the subjects in the BEd(Pri) that were refined as part of STAR are no longer offered and so additional work is required to examine the new subjects from the Transition and Retention perspective.

Recommendation 12. Follow up work be undertaken to scrutinise the assessment in all first year undergraduate subjects to ensure alignment with first year curriculum principles.

Assessment feedback

The STAR academic lead in Primary Education and Exercise Science worked with subject coordinators to trial 'feed forward' assessment strategies which focussed on providing students with high quality lecturer or peer feedback and required students in a subsequent assignment to explicitly address the feedback from a previous assignment. The quality of feedback is well accepted to be a very important aspect of the student learning process, and evidence suggests that students often have difficulty understanding or making use of feedback. These strategies are intended to improve the quality of feedback and increase student engagement with feedback.

The strategies were viewed positively by most staff and students as evidenced by survey responses. Some staff identified additional workload as an issue. Students in general indicated that their greatest need was for feedback about where their work could have been improved and it is expected that the use of detailed rubrics as part of the new criterion and standards based assessment policy will address this.

Recommendation 4: Feedback strategies should be explicitly focused on providing students with learning about how to improve. 'Feed forward' strategies show substantial promise to this end but require additional marking time.

Transition resources

STAR academic leads working in the BIS and BEd(B-5) distance courses created a range of online resources to support students in undertaking assessment tasks and other learning activities. Anecdotal evidence suggested that many distance students struggle with certain kinds of writing tasks and ICT tasks and also need scaffolding in understanding the requirements of assessment tasks. Online resources were developed to address this need. Feedback from staff and students on surveys and anecdotally was generally positive, although there was varying degrees of engagement with and use of the resources by subject coordinators and other teaching staff.

Recommendation 13. The online academic and ICT skill development resources developed for BIS students be reviewed and refined in consultation with subject teams and links to these resources be integrated into subject materials as appropriate.

Recommendation 24. An Interact site be developed for the B-5 course including information and academic support resources developed specifically for this course as well as links to more generic resources provided by other parts of the university.

Recommendation 28. The online booklet to support B-5 students in completion of assessment tasks should be further refined and links to the booklet should be integrated into all subjects in the degree.

Academic skills

The STAR team explored and trialled a number of strategies for improving student academic skills, including the promotion of Studylink subjects, the provision of face to face development activities, and the provision of resources. Despite efforts to promote them few students completed Studylink subjects. This appeared to be primarily because they did not feel that they had sufficient time to complete these subjects over and above their other subjects during the session and they were not usually early enough to complete them before the start of session.

Recommendation 18. Studylink subjects be advertised to incoming students as soon as possible after acceptance of their offer, to allow their completion before the commencement of the course.

Recommendation 19. Students, who exhibit a particular difficulty with academic skills, as exhibited in subject-based assessment and activities, should be advised to undertake relevant Studylink subjects ideally during the optional session 3 period.

Recommendation 20. Evaluation of student perceptions of Studylink subjects and analysis of the performance of students who complete them is needed to provide a stronger empirical base for judgements about their value for students in specific courses.

As discussed above, weekly face to face orientation sessions were trialled during first session of the Exercise Science program and these sessions included a focus on academic skill development. The lack of engagement with these sessions suggests that such activities may be better integrated into the design of subjects or targeted at

individual students exhibiting problems through their assessment rather than scheduled for all students as a commitment over and above their subjects.

Recommendation 6. Regular activities focussed on student orientation, transition or academic skill development should in general be integrated into subjects rather than scheduled on a course basis beyond the normal subject timetable.

Recommendation 7. Student engagement in academic skill support activities is likely to be greater if these activities are targeted at individual students based on their performance in assessment tasks and/or screening tests rather than delivered to all students in a cohort.

Identification of Students at Risk

In 2011 and 2012 STAR teams were asked to identify students at risk of withdrawal from the course or a particular subject and to provide their names to the Student Success Team in Academic Support. These students were then contacted by phone and/or email by the Student Success Team and provided with generic advice to support them in remaining in their course or subject.

Based on data from the student success team as well as anecdotal data the team concluded that contact with at risk students of a generic nature has a positive effect in some instances but is probably less effective than contact by a Subject Coordinator or Course Director with detailed knowledge of their course and subjects. Difficulties in making phone contact with students were encountered in all courses but this was particularly common in distance courses.

The STAR team explored a number of data sources relating to student entry characteristics and engagement to determine possible at risk indicators and undertook some statistical analysis using data from prior years to help inform this. The key outcome from this analysis was that, in general, engagement after commencing university is a stronger indicator than demographic characteristics or prior academic achievement.

Recommendation 15. In addition to university wide efforts to derive ‘at risk’ indicators there is value in course specific analysis to identify patterns of activity/engagement or subject completion/performance common to students who withdraw.

Recommendation 16. Follow ups with students ‘at risk’ are likely to be more effective if carried out by Subject Coordinators or Course Directors but caution is needed given the time commitment this might require.

Recommendation 17. Regardless of who has responsibility for follow up with students ‘at risk’ better mechanisms are needed to provide timely information to Subject Coordinators and Course Directors about the engagement status and performance of students in the subjects and courses they are responsible for.

Attendance

Attendance data was collected and analysed within first year subjects in the Primary Education and Exercise science programs and based on this analysis a trial of compulsory attendance was introduced across 1st and 2nd year within all Teacher Education and Exercise Science programs in session 2 2013. This trial encompassed students in first and second year of the BEd(Primary), BEd(EC/Primary), BEd(K-12), BEd(TAS), BEd(PDHPE) and BExSci in Wagga, Albury, Bathurst and Dubbo campuses (approximately 600 students). The rationale for this trial was that research reported in the literature along with analysis of data collected during STAR suggested that attendance is an important contributor to student grade outcomes.

Analysis suggested that attendance had a significant effect on student grades. This effect was most noticeable for very low levels of attendance (e.g. less than 20%), which was strongly correlated with the likelihood of a 0% numeric mark for the subject and for very high levels of attendance (e.g. greater than 80%), which was linked to an average 7% increase in student numeric marks compared to lower levels of attendance.

Recommendation 3: Strategies to increase attendance through communication, professional development and policy should be vigorously pursued.

1.4 Overall impact of the STAR program in the Faculty

The data analysis undertaken is inconclusive with regard to the overall impact of the STAR program in the Faculty of Education on student retention and progress. The inconclusiveness of the data partly reflects the lagged nature of audited data on student retention/attrition and progress. Nevertheless the lack of conclusive evidence that the initiatives put in place during the STAR program have had an impact is somewhat disappointing given the size, scope and cost of the program.

1.5 Key recommendations for the future

The following are the key recommendations for the Faculty which draw together the main themes running across the full set of individual recommendations discussed above:

Key Recommendation 1. Any future transition and retention initiatives within the Faculty should have a much closer involvement of Course Directors to ensure a greater focus on changes within course and subject designs rather than on the provision of support activities outside of subjects.

Key Recommendation 2. Drawing on the findings of STAR, best practice within the sector and wider scholarship, the Faculty should agree on a set of first year curriculum principles to underpin the design of subjects within the first year of all courses.

Key Recommendation 3. The Faculty should resource course leadership teams to oversee the scrutiny and refinement of subjects in their courses to implement agreed first year curriculum principles.

Key Recommendation 4. The faculty should develop a policy document that sets out expectations on teaching academic staff to ensure that agreed first year curriculum principles are followed in the teaching of all first year subjects.

2 Background

2.1 Sources of funding

As a result of the Bradley Review of Higher Education, several targets have been put in place by the Australian Government. One such target is that by 2020, 20% of enrolments will be from students from LSES backgrounds.

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) has been established to provide funding to universities to increase participation of students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds.

Part of the CSU allocation of HEPPP funding was utilised on the STAR (Student Transition and Retention) Plan. The STAR Plan provides an integrated approach to student transition and retention initiatives across the university.

2.2 STAR Courses in the Faculty of Education

There were four courses identified as focus courses in the Faculty of Education. Initially the Bachelor of Education (Primary) and the Bachelor of Information Studies were identified and these were the focus courses for the first year of the program in 2011. Subsequently, late in 2011 two additional courses, the Bachelor of Exercise Science and the Bachelor of Education (Birth to 5) were added. Each course was chosen based on the Socio Economic Status (SES) makeup of its students and its record on retention.

2.3 The STAR Team

In each faculty, STAR academic lead positions, each with a 50% fraction, were created for each of four courses, and two full time STAR support positions were created to support the work of the academic leads. The members of the Faculty of Education STAR team were Georgina Sanger (Academic Lead for the Primary Education and Exercise Science courses from 2012), Roy Crotty (Academic Lead for the Information Studies course), Celia Hilman (Academic Lead for the Birth to 5 Education course from 2012), Liam Downing (STAR Support from 2012), Chelsea Kovacs (STAR Support during 2011 and 2012), Rhonda Hoare (Academic Lead Primary Education Wagga during 2011), and Graham Daniels (Academic Lead Primary Education Bathurst during 2011).

2.4 Aims of the STAR Plan

As stated on the original STAR website:

“The overall aim of the STAR plan is increased retention and enhanced student experience for LSES students. While the emphasis is on the participation and success of LSES students, it is anticipated that the STAR Plan will have wide reaching benefits for all students.”

(<http://www.csu.edu.au/student/transition/deliverables/6.htm>)

2.5 Evaluating the STAR program

2.5.1 Rationale

When an opportunity like STAR comes along (with its associated funding and potential for real improvements in teaching), it is vital that lessons learned are recorded accurately and in such a way that they can inform future practice. Doing so will allow for best practice to become entrenched, and for good strategies to be justified.

However, evaluating the student experience arising from programs like STAR is currently a largely ad hoc space, in that there is no formalised strategy for evaluating them. Sample sizes in existing surveys such as the Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) are extremely small (even when taking into account finite population sizes), to the extent that they offer little to no statistical power in their findings. Without a comprehensive evaluation strategy, it is difficult to evaluate the true impact of a plan, particularly when the quantitative indicators are not likely to reflect its outcome in the short or even medium term (i.e. during the plan's lifespan).

2.5.2 Overview

With this in mind, STAR has been regularly collecting and analysing both administrative and primary data in qualitative and quantitative forms. Administrative data collected include:

- Detailed student demographic data going back to 2009
- Pre entry academic factors including ATAR
- Attendance data
 - Some STAR subjects from 201230-201330
 - 39 first and second year Faculty of Education subjects in 201360

Primary data collection has included:

- Student survey in mid 2012
- Staff survey in late 2012
- 'Check up' survey in April 2013
- Student survey for evaluating STAR initiatives, August 2013
- Focus Groups between February and August 2013.

In addition, STAR has worked to ensure regular communications with staff at all levels within the Faculty to pick up any additional issues not covered. While the swift implementation of STAR did not allow for a full, 360 degree, start to finish evaluation of the plan, the breadth and depth of data gathered since 2011 and early 2012 has allowed for a robust, defensible evaluation to take place.

2.5.3 Evaluation

While there were a number of existing quantitative modes of evaluating the student experience at the beginning of 2012 (such as the SEQ and subject evaluations), these were relatively sparse and did not allow for any robust analysis of statistical findings. For example, response rates in the SEQ ranged from 22% in 2010 down to just 8% in 2012 in Primary Education, while in Exercise Science only one student completed the

survey in 2012. In addition, qualitative forms of evaluation were thin and largely ad hoc, and appear not to have been recorded for future analysis.

The ongoing focus on collecting, collating and analysing a range of data sources with a focus on evaluation has served STAR well. They have provided weight behind STAR's ongoing suggestions and recommendations, and strong rationales for continuing certain aspects of the plan.

The following are 'mini evaluations' of each component of the STAR Evaluation, which provide insight into what types of methodology are most effective.

2.5.3.1 *Evaluation among students*

2.5.3.1.1 Research project survey

In 201260, STAR conducted a survey among first and second year students in the STAR courses with the aim of gaining insight into their backgrounds, working and caring hours, perceived academic abilities and thoughts about the course. The questionnaire is attached at Appendix F. Response rates were good (total of n=125), allowing for some statistical analysis, and were significantly higher than comparable SEQ rates. Surveys were conducted in class and online.

Although valuable in providing an insight into where students are, analyses found that factors such as working hours per week, perceived academic ability and attitudinal statements about university were of little value in terms of predicting academic risk. As such, the instrument is of little use in the context of the transition process.

2.5.3.1.2 'Check in' survey

In late 201330, STAR conducted a very short (1 page) survey among first and second year students in the STAR courses (and also in the Early Childhood-Primary course) to check in on students as they progressed throughout their course. Instead of focusing on pre-entry and attitudinal factors, this survey focused on how students were 'travelling' in their course, and what initiatives (STAR and otherwise) they found useful. The questionnaire is attached at Appendix G, and was delivered in class. The survey yielded n=202 responses (n=141 in the STAR courses and n=61 in Early Childhood-Primary); a very high response rate.

The survey found that the highest proportions of students rated the following aspects of university as useful:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| • Tutorials | 95% |
| • Interact | 84% |
| • Lectures | 82% |
| • Lecturers | 67% |
| • The Library (Learning Commons) | 54% |
| • PASS | 29% |
| • Sport and Fitness | 23% |
| • Talking to Learn/Study of Teaching | 19% |
| • Clubs and Societies | 15% |

The survey found levels of agreement (on a 0-10 scale) with the following statements:

- University is better than I expected 6.3
- I have chosen the right course 7.8
- I think I am succeeding in my studies 6.4
- I would like more support in my studies 6.3

Among those who rated their agreement with the statement about succeeding in their studies at 5 or lower, agreement with 'I would like more support in my studies' was 7.0.

This style of survey was useful in its ability to 'take the pulse' of a course, and would allow subject and course directors to provide general support to a whole cohort. Because of its brevity, it can easily be delivered in class, and is likely to yield a very good response rate.

2.5.3.1.3 Focus groups and interviews

In 201330 and 201360, STAR conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with first and second year students in STAR courses. The group discussion/interview guide is attached at Appendix H. The key challenge in organising these groups was recruitment, in that without the ability to offer incentives (as stipulated in the research ethics documents), STAR was only able to target students who were altruistic in their attitude towards the university. Given altruism towards CSU may not be a trait among many 'at-risk' students, incentives may have expanded our range and number of participants.

That said, the groups and interviews (which were recorded and transcribed) offered valuable context to many of the findings arising from analysis, and form an integral part of the evaluation. Analysis was thematic, and transcripts were also used to source more in-depth data on factors uncovered in our other (quantitative) analyses.

2.5.3.1.4 Evaluation survey of STAR initiatives

In mid 201360, STAR conducted a moderate length (5 page) survey among first year STAR students to evaluate the success or otherwise of its major initiatives. The moderate length allowed for more in depth questioning than was allowed in the check-in survey, and this questioning focused very specifically on the initiatives that STAR put in place. There was also ample space for verbatim responses, so students supplied valuable qualitative data in addition to their quantitative responses. The survey questionnaire (attached at Appendix I) was delivered in class. The survey yielded n=161 responses from the three STAR courses, giving it the best response rate of all STAR surveys.

Of all the quantitative surveys among students, this was the most successful. This was due to its comprehensiveness and verbatim responses, and it was about the right length for most students to complete without getting survey fatigue. As such, this survey could be used as a model for future evaluations.

2.5.3.2 *Evaluation among staff*

2.5.3.2.1 STAR evaluation survey

In 201260, STAR conducted a survey among staff teaching in first year students in any of the STAR courses. The survey was anonymously completed online, and had a large number of open response questions (which staff were happy to fill out). The questionnaire is attached at Appendix J. Seventeen (n=17) staff members responded; a 77% response rate.

That lecturers were so keen to fill in the questionnaire was encouraging, and an indication of the level of engagement they had with STAR. It also indicates that this survey's format could serve as a template for future surveys among staff.

2.5.3.2.2 Coffee with a STAR

Although not strictly evaluation, Georgina Sanger's interviews with exemplars of best practice for the 'STARS on the BUSS' newsletter were very good forums for lecturers who embodied STAR to provide excellent quality qualitative feedback. They are attached at Appendix K. In essence, they are 'mini in-subject evaluations', and provide insight into the logistical and pedagogical aspects of STAR strategies from the coalface.

By making these discussions public (to CSU staff), they could have the ability to serve as case studies for those looking at implementing similar initiatives in future.

2.5.3.2.3 Email Q&A

Leading up to the end of Liam Downing's term as STAR Support, he sent out a range of short Q&A format emails to lecturers to gather their thoughts on the overall STAR plan. The questions were qualitative in nature, and formatted in an open ended manner without any leading/directing questions. The emails were very short (with a maximum of 8 responses), yet allowed for staff to supply detailed responses if they so desired.

This format seems to work well for some lecturers, particularly those who are time poor.

2.5.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 1. Future transition and retention programs should be evaluated in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Student surveys should be of a moderate length, focus on specific initiatives and be delivered anonymously in class to maximise response rates. Quantitative data should always be accompanied by qualitative data to provide context. Staff surveys should allow a large proportion of responses to be open ended and be delivered anonymously online.

Where it is not possible to use methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods, evaluations should nevertheless be systematic and defensible. This can include using short response Q&A emails.

3 Overall impact of STAR

3.1 Attrition

The following table summarises the percentage of students withdrawing from a course prior to their third year. These figures are derived from the CSU's Office of Planning and Audit's official first year attrition figures. First year attrition according to Planning and Audit is defined as the proportion of students who withdraw from university prior to completing the entire second year of study. Given the data are only calculated after the census date in the third year of study, this is a lagged measure, in that it only becomes available just over two years after the student commences. In interpreting the table it is important to acknowledge that the STAR program commenced at the beginning of 2011 for the BEd(Primary) course and the BIS course, late in 2011 for the BExSci course and early in 2012 for the BEd(B-5) course. Because audited figures are needed for this analysis data from the 2011 cohort is the most recent available. Analysis of this data suggests that it is possible that the STAR program had a slight positive impact on attrition for BEd(Primary) students commencing in 2011, while it may have had a negative impact on the BIS for students commencing in 2011.

Attrition prior to 3rd year (based on Planning and Audit figures)

		Commencing year				
Attrition		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
3408PR	BEd(Primary)		17%	16%	15%	14%
3407ES	BExSci	6%	13%	16%	23%	20%
Whole of CSU (Internal)		17%	16%	16%	15%	16%
3409BC	BEd(B-5)			29%	32%	24%
3410LS	BIS				22%	30%
Whole of CSU (Distance)				31%	34%	35%

The following table summarises the percentage of students withdrawing from a course prior to their second year. These figures are derived from Banner reports. These figures were drawn by calculating the proportion of students who withdrew from university prior to the census date in first session of the second year of their studies. This measure is intended as representing a 'to date' attrition figure at the end of first year (rather than the end of second year in the official figures). Care should be taken in interpreting these figures, as they may or may not correspond with official attrition figures once they are made available. This data suggests that there was little if any change in attrition within the Exercise Science and Birth to Five courses following the introduction of STAR in these courses late in 2011. The data suggests that if there was an impact of STAR on attrition in the Primary and Information Studies courses it may have been a negative rather than a positive impact.

Attrition prior to 2nd year (based on Banner figures)

		Commencing year			
Attrition		2010	2011	2012	2013
3408PR	BEd(Primary)	8%	7%	11%	15%
3407ES	BExSci	11%	9%	11%	9%
3409BC	BEd(B-5)	15%	11%	18%	19%
3410LS	BIS	14%	16%	18%	25%

3.2 Progress

The following table shows the rate of progress for students commencing each year. These figures are derived from the CSU's Office of Planning and Audit's official first year progress figures. First year progress is calculated as a proportion by dividing the number of completed equivalent full time student loads (EFTSL) by the number of attempted (base) EFTSLs. Analysis of this data suggests that the STAR program may have had a positive impact on progress in the BEd(B-5) and BIS courses but there was not a clear improvement in rate of progress in either the BEd(pri) or BExSci course. It is important to acknowledge, however, that both the BIS and the B-5 courses underwent curriculum changes during these periods and so improvements in progress rates could be due to other factors beyond the STAR initiative.

Rate of progress in first year subjects

		Commencing year				
Progress		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
3408PR	BEd(Primary)	89%	85%	86%	83%	84%
3407ES	BExSci	92%	83%	76%	84%	78%
Whole of CSU (Internal)		83%	83%	84%	83%	84%
3409BC	BEd(B-5)		77%	74%	81%	81%
3410LS	BIS			78%	75%	80%
Whole of CSU (Distance)			79%	75%	76%	78%

3.3 Student Experience

The following table shows scores for Overall Satisfaction within the Student Experience Survey completed by second year students within each course in each year. Unfortunately there were insufficient responses to the survey from Exercise Science students for the data for this course to be included. These figures are drawn from the official Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) results. The SEQ is a tool with which students' experiences of their first year of university are measured. Overall satisfaction is an indexed score based on measures on the topics good teaching, generic skills, learning resources, student support, graduate qualities, library experience, academic support and sense of belonging. This data indicates that the STAR program may have had a positive impact on overall course satisfaction for

BEd(Primary) students commencing in 2011, while the impact for BIS students may have been a negative one (B-5 students did not experience STAR until 2012 and 2013 SES data is not yet available).

		Overall satisfaction within the Student Experience Survey			
		Commencing year			
Experience		2009	2010	2011	2012
3408PR	BEd(Primary)	85%	85%	75%	92%
Whole of CSU (Internal)		73%	74%	80%	81%
3409BC	BEd(B-5)			77%	67%
3410LS	BIS			88%	84%
Whole of CSU (Distance)				81%	78%

3.4 Impact overall

The data analysis undertaken is inconclusive with regard to the overall impact of the STAR program in the Faculty of Education on student retention, progress and the student experience. The inconclusiveness of the data partly reflects the lagged nature of audited data on student retention/attrition and progress. Nevertheless the lack of conclusive evidence that the initiatives put in place during the STAR program have had a positive impact is somewhat disappointing given the size, scope and cost of the program.

4 STAR Initiatives – Exercise Science and Primary Education

4.1 Early Low Stakes Assessment

4.1.1 Rationale

Early low stakes assessment is a key component of the First Year Curriculum Principles. It creates an opportunity for formative feedback that is useful for subsequent tasks, early notification for staff and students of skill/knowledge, the possibility of early intervention, and an introduction to assessment that provides a chance ‘to recover’. As Wilson and Lizzio suggest, “this performance feedback may also signal a gap in study skills and practices, self-management capability or academic efficacy that may be amenable to early intervention and improvement” (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008, p. 1).

It also provides an early moment of engagement with students, and limits complacency that can set in if assessment tasks are too late in session.

Early, low stakes assessment fits within the following, from the First Year Curriculum Principles document:

“5. Assessment

The first year curriculum should assist students to make a successful transition to assessment in higher education, while assessment should increase in complexity from the first to later years of curriculum design. Critically, students should receive regular, formative evaluations of their work early in their program of study to aid their learning and to provide feedback to both students and staff on student progress and achievement.

1. Schedule an early piece of formative assessment to be submitted and returned before Week 4 to:

- relieve early student anxiety*
- provide feedback to both students and staff on student*
- progress and achievement*
- identify students in need of extra support.”*

<http://www.csu.edu.au/student/transition/doc/PrinciplesFirstYearTeacher.pdf>

4.1.2 Overview

Early low stakes assessment tasks were included in the following subjects over the course of the STAR Plan:

- In exercise science:
 - EHR101
 - EHR109
 - EHR221
 - EHR211
 - EHR117

- In primary education:
 - EML110
 - EML210
 - EEP106
 - EMS108
 - EPT115.

An example of one of these assessments can be found in Appendix A.

4.1.3 Evaluation

4.1.3.1 Lecturers' points of view

Despite the number of subjects in which they were undertaken, the implementation of early low stakes assessments has been generally positively received by lecturers; albeit with some clear issues around workload (whether perceived or real).

The benefits of early low stakes assessment for lecturers are primarily geared around their ability to flag problems early, and take steps to address them.

“Expanded communication between students and myself, increased support from me in being proactive in scaffolding learning and assessment. Failure of

assessment task 1 (18 of 81 received) clearly identified a need for increased literacy (essay writing support).”

“Building in low stakes early assessment tasks that are completed as part of tutorials that give students clear feedback on their progress, as well as identifying needs and the ways to address these - eg who do they go to for help.”

“The majority of students completed the item. This added to the complexity of the assessment process but students found the other items were less onerous.”

Encouragingly, the results of such trials led to some positive outcomes.

“[Early low stakes assessment] led to writing techniques being embedded in lectures and overall writing of all students seemed to improve across the session, compared to past cohorts. [It] avoided the major disappointment that tended to happen after the first task, which used to be week 5, 25%.”

Issues with the early low stakes assessment items were largely related to the additional workload they generate, and included a perceived ‘two assessment item limit’, despite no policy in the area. This is a possible explanatory factor in the ‘cautious’ uptake of the initiative.

“Time consuming. Marking 130 x 5% tasks early on. Felt I spent a lot of time teaching students how to write, rather than thinking deeply about the subject content.”

“Time is the biggest barrier. We all want to assist students and create an environment that helps them learn but in most weeks there is not enough time in the day/week to do everything you want to achieve.”

4.1.3.2 Students’ points of view

Students’ agreement on a 0-10 scale with statements about early, low stakes tasks’ manageability (6.7) and enabling students to settle in (6.5) and improve (6.7) were moderately high. This suggests that the tasks are working in the way that they are designed to, albeit with some room for improvement.

When asked about what type of tasks would make good early, low stakes assessments, students typically suggested reflective tasks (unprompted) as their preference. This suggests that students would welcome tasks which help them think about their own learning.

“Personal reflections and opinions, not excessive theory work.”

“Basic skills. Information tasks.”

“Reflections on learning and areas that we feel we can and need to improve in.”

“I prefer just simple essays around 750-1000 words for early low stakes.”

“Group activities.”

“Tasks relevant to the subject but achievable to the incoming student.”

“Reflective, not long!”

4.1.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 2: Early, low stakes assessment tasks should be incorporated into all first year on campus subjects in a manner that allows students to ease into the academic context.

Early, low stakes tasks should provide an opportunity to develop an academic skill; with the intent that that skill is used also in subsequent task(s) is of greatest benefit.

Students have identified a desire for reflective tasks, and this desire forms part of this recommendation.

The task needs to be fun, engaging, and able to be marked quickly so that feedback can be used for the next task.

Early, low stakes task must be well scaffolded and described, and skills required must be taught explicitly.

The task should provide initial opportunity for students to learn about feedback, and this should be taught.

4.2 Attendance

4.2.1 Rationale

Good attendance in face to face university classes is often viewed among lecturers as one of the keys to a student succeeding in a subject.

In the broader literature, there is a great deal of supporting evidence for the assertion that there is a positive correlation between attendance and grade, suggesting (but not necessarily proving) that attendance predicts success. In this respect, class attendance is likely to be our best possible ‘at risk indicator’. For example, Credé, Roch and Kieszczyńska (2010, p. 286) found that ‘class attendance [is] a better predictor of college grades than any other known predictor of academic performance’.

Another finding in the literature is that regularly communicating with students about attendance using empirical data is likely to improve both attendance and grades. As Moore et al. (2006) found, such communications – when authentic and timely – are likely to lead to better outcomes for students who fall into high range failure but do not understand the importance of class attendance in the context of their academic performance.

However, at CSU, very little data exist on the relationship between attendance and student success, and there was little in the way of a coherent strategy to address attendance through communication, policy and professional development. In this context, there existed an opportunity for STAR to provide the Faculty with robust,

meaningful knowledge in this area, and to provide recommendations on how to best address this key factor.

Attendance fits within the First Year Principles of Diversity, Design and Engagement.

4.2.2 Overview

Since the beginning of STAR in 2011, a number of data points have been gathered to assess, identify and support students-at-risk as soon as possible.

These data points have included pre entry measures such as socioeconomic status (SES), mode of entry and first in family status, and post entry measures including accessing subject outline, grade in first assessment and class attendance.

Between 201230 and 201330, STAR has collected attendance data on a limited basis in subjects within the Bachelor of Education (Primary) and the Bachelor of Exercise Science. Data from 201130 were also gathered, and were included in analysis.

At the end of 201330, on the basis of findings from analysis of attendance data and grades, STAR developed and distributed a poster on a small scale (*GO TO CLASS. Seriously.* – included in Appendix B) to inform students about the relationship between attendance and success.

In 201360, a large scale trial of a compulsory attendance policy was implemented in the Faculty of Education, with data from most subjects across the faculty due to be analysed in late 2013 for evaluative purposes.

4.2.2.1 Attendance poster

In subjects for which attendance data is complete for both tutorials/workshops and lectures, attendance (as measured by percentage of classes attended) is a strong predictor of subject grade percentage. Using a regression chart from a subject in which the relationship can be clearly seen, STAR created an attendance poster (*GO TO CLASS. Seriously.*). The poster focused on a single subject to emphasise the individual points on the chart as individual students, thus encouraging students to see how their own attendance behaviour might have an impact on final grade. The message was deliberately blunt, but there is an emphasis on positivity through the final line: ‘It’s the single best predictor of your grade’.

This poster was then distributed in A3 and A1 posters across four Faculty of Education campuses (Albury, Bathurst, Dubbo and Wagga Wagga) and digital format directly to some students, primarily in the STAR internal courses. The distribution of the A1 posters was somewhat limited, as this was primarily a pilot (and any future posters will require different contact points).

4.2.3 Evaluation

4.2.3.1 The impact of pre entry factors

At best, pre-entry factors are only minor predictors of success, while the majority of pre-entry factors are either only very marginally or not at all predictive of success.

The following are some highlights based on testing students across 2009-2013 (thus allowing a good sample size for significance testing):

Although at a glance first in family status looks to yield lower GPAs, the differences are not significant. Additional testing also revealed first-in-family status in and of itself is a poor predictor of success (regression R-square score of .011), and it does not contribute positively when placed in a model alongside attendance for 201230 students (discussed below).

Even when testing among all students who commenced between 2009 and 2012, no significant differences in GPA were found by SES group (tested at $<.05$ and $<.10$). Regression analysis yielded a regression R-square value of 0.000. At CSU in both Exercise Science and Primary Education, SES can therefore be (comprehensively) classed as non-predictive.

ATAR is – to be generous – a minor-moderate predictor of success, with a regression R-square score of .122 upon GPA. Although it is clear that the very few students in the STAR courses who achieved an ATAR approaching 100 performed very well at CSU, once ATAR scores dropped below 85, predictive power was poor. Given that indicative ATAR scores are 70 in Exercise Science and Primary Education and ‘real’ ATAR entry scores are lower, it is unlikely we can rely upon the vast majority of ATAR scores in the Faculty as a good predictor of academic performance.

4.2.3.2 Attendance as a predictor of success

In subjects for which attendance data is complete for both tutorials/workshops and lectures, attendance (as measured by percentage of classes attended) is a strong predictor of success (as measured by total percentage grade) in that subject. For example, in EML110 in Bathurst (in which all attendance was recorded very accurately), the following correlation and regression R-square scores were found: (Pearson Correlation=.716, regression R-square = .513. Both are significant at $p<.001$).

While not as strong a predictor as total attendance, it is worth noting that attendance levels in the first two weeks are also reasonable indicators of subject success, suggesting this factor could be used to indicate which students could be at risk of failing a subject very early on in the session (if attendance was recorded and analysed in a timely manner). EML110 in Bathurst (Primary Ed) showed the following scores: Pearson Correlation=.524, regression R-square = .275

These results support the long held truism that attendance in class is likely to lead to better grades. While the limitations of any social research mean that we cannot prove causation, that attendance is a better predictor of grade than any other variable should provide some pause for thought when designing ways of supporting students in the Faculty.

4.2.3.3 Attendance poster

A survey conducted in 201360 on STAR initiatives found that the *GO TO CLASS* poster had about 15% reach among students in STAR courses. This varied from 9% among Exercise Science students to 16% among Wagga and 17% among Bathurst

Primary Education students. These findings illustrate that the poster is potentially visible, but is yet to achieve high levels of penetration among its target group. That said, for a limited release, the findings do present the possibility that further penetration into student centric areas such as halls of residence or dining areas may create greater impact.

Focus group findings illustrated that the poster was effective in its message, in that students understood the message of importance attached to attendance.

“You’re more likely to pass if you put in the effort to go to the classes. It’s a part of the learning process. It’s not just doing assessments, which I think people think it is just that.”

“It’s basically what every lecturer and every PASS person has been saying, every week they just say, the more you come to these things, the more likely you are to pass. It’s really kind of a no brainer.”

“Go to class. Seriously, it’s going to help you in the future. I like how it’s sort of like – it’s not demanding you go to class, but it’s saying, ‘Go to class, seriously. You’re going to do well,’ and that’s a good motivator.”

Solicited and unsolicited feedback from staff has also been overwhelmingly positive, from both within and beyond the Faculty. Posters (digital and paper versions) have been requested and distributed by the Faculty of Science, Learning Support and even the CSU Study Centre in Sydney.

4.2.3.4 201360 compulsory attendance trial

In 201360, as part of the ESLANITE (Enhancing Student Literacy And Numeracy IN Teacher Education), STAR is playing a key role in providing the rationale for and evaluating a compulsory attendance policy in first and second year internal subjects across the Faculty of Education. The evaluation will take into account issues with implementation as well as analysis of student performance against attendance following the implementation of the policy. STAR is currently collecting – and will analyse – attendance data in 39 first and second year subjects. The evaluation will be completed by the end of 2013, complemented by a qualitative component authored by Denise Wood, providing the Faculty (and perhaps CSU) with its first ever in-depth look at an attendance policy and its impact on a broader scale.

Among students, survey findings on the policy show that agreement with statements about the policy showing the university cares about attendance (mean agreement of 7.5 on a 0-10 scale of agreement) and the policy encouraging students to show up to class (7.5) were high, while agreement with the fairness of the policy showed a level of ambivalence (5.6). Mean agreement with a statement saying the 50% threshold was too low was 3.7 on the same scale.

While the trial is not yet complete, its implementation is having a similar (albeit more concrete) impact on teaching staff to that of the *GO TO CLASS* poster in that it is acting as a catalyst for conversation about the role of quality, authentic teaching in the classroom, even when potentially disengaged students are present through mandate rather than desire to learn.

4.2.3.5 Attendance and teaching

Quite aside from any findings about how the attendance policy trial impacts on students' final grades (which will not be finalised until later in 2013), its implementation has had already an anecdotally large impact on how teaching staff are talking about its impact on their own teaching. Much of this conversation appears to be focusing on how larger classes of potentially disengaged students may affect the classroom dynamic, and strategies for coping with this.

Additionally, there has been a large focus on making classes more engaging and authentic to encourage attendance in ways other than the policy. Whether the policy does have its desired effect or not, such conversations provide encouraging signs that the discussion will continue.

Finally, conversations in forums such as Yammer and the ESLANITE group suggest that teaching staff are thinking much more seriously about how their teaching might provide the carrot (of engaging authenticity) to counter or complement the stick (of policy).

4.2.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 3: Strategies to increase attendance through communication, professional development and policy should be vigorously pursued.

The single best predictor of grade performance in internal subjects is attendance. That attendance is such a strong predictor should inform its level of importance to the Faculty. This also translates that the single best predictor of failure in a given subject is low attendance.

The very strong relationship between attendance in class and subject success needs to be made very clear to students, and reinforced throughout each session. This should be done through the presentation of authentic and contextualised empirical data.

The attendance policy trial will need to be fully evaluated, but based on our data and the literature, the minimum attendance threshold (currently 50%) should be raised to at least 70% or 80%, which is the minimum level at which the real benefit of attendance seems to reside according to both the broader literature and STAR's own research.

Lecturers need to be more aware of the 'what for?' factor – why should students go to class or engage with online learning material? Lessons and material need to be engaging, and there needs to be more opportunities for collaborative learning so that students are accountable to each other. (Assessment should not include group work until skills required for successful collaboration are TAUGHT and practised in class).

4.3 Feedback and Feedforward

4.3.1 Rationale

One of the most influential articles underpinning the Black and William review (1998) (<http://weaeducation.typepad.co.uk/files/blackbox-1.pdf>), and the writings of other researchers (e.g. Yorke, 2003), is that of Sadler (1989). Sadler identified three conditions necessary for students to benefit from feedback in academic tasks. He argued that the student must know:

1. what good performance is (i.e. the student must possess a concept of the goal or standard being aimed for);
2. how current performance relates to good performance (for this, the student must be able to compare current and good performance);
3. how to act to close the gap between current and good performance” (Sadler, 1989, cited in Nicol & Dick, 2006, p. 204).

In support, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that “effective feedback answers three questions – where am I going?, which is Feed Up; how am I going?, which is Feed Back; and Where to next?, which is Feed Forward” (p. yy). The following are the key points underlining the rationale for focusing on feedback and feedforward:

- Feedback is the single most important factor in improving student performance
- To increase the profile of feedback as a part of the learning and teaching process
- To teach students about the importance of feedback and how to interact with feedback
- To teach students how to interpret feedback and how to apply feedback in subsequent tasks
- To put the teacher back in the feedback process (accountability) and to improve the quality of feedback provided to students, so that students gain a greater understanding /knowledge of HOW to improve – ‘close the gap’.

In short, if a student is to progress, the broader literature suggests that feedback is paramount, and that this feedback must be delivered in such a way that it offers meaningful pathways to improvement for subsequent (and other) assessments.

4.3.2 Overview

Feedback/feedforward trials were included in the following subjects over the course of the STAR Plan from 2012 to 2013:

- In exercise science:
 - EHR112
- In Primary Education:
 - EML110
 - EML210
 - EEP106

An example of these feedforward tasks can be found in Appendix C. Initially, in 201330, these feedforward trials were to be supported through the allocation of additional marking hours to EML110 in Bathurst. However, due to a breakdown in communication, these marking hours were mistakenly allocated to a subject not involved in the trial, and a subject where the engagement of the lecturer with STAR was poor. Luckily, Jae Major, subject director for EML110, chose to undertake the trial again as it had proved highly successful in 201230.

4.3.3 Evaluation

4.3.3.1 Lecturers' points of view

Feedback from lecturers who trialled feedforward was very positive. Comments about the benefits of feedforward typically related to students' observable levels of improvement as they progressed throughout the scaffolded assessment tasks, and the fact that viewing feedback is made to be part of the assessment process. Lecturers typically found feedforward to be a highly valuable part of their teaching strategy.

"I think it is effective in helping students understand the comments they receive on their work. Separating out the suggestions for improvement allows students to focus on them rather than having to glean them from general comments on the marking sheet."

"I think the feed forward concept is great. It's good to see that they've actually read comments and thought about how to address problems. Makes me feel better about giving feedback in the first place. There's nothing worse than students who don't try to improve themselves so I think this gives them an opportunity to show to their lecturers that they are listening and developing their skills. It also gives us an opportunity to draw connections between assignments and provide some more 'longitudinal' coaching on essay writing skills. So, yeah, it's a good idea I reckon."

"Students are required to engage with feedback; to consider how to use feedback to make their next assignment better."

"Very [effective]. The assessment items I have students do... are sequential (i.e. assessment 1 feeds into assessment 2, etc.) so I could see the improving quality of each assignment."

"Assessment items are not just about assessing... students need to learn from them. If they are going to learn from an assessment, feedforward is an integral part of teaching."

"It provides specific guidance to students about what they can do to improve their work. It also provides guidance to markers about what advice to give to students. It is targeted and ensures guidance is given in a constructive way. It also provides a focus for reading assessment comments and a means for getting students to plan how to respond to the feedback/forward they receive."

"It can be a bit more time consuming to complete, and sometimes it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what needs work. This is especially the case where there are problems with the overall writing and coherence of a student's work. Markers need to have expertise in giving explicit feedback/suggestions about improving academic writing/literacy which is not always easy to do (it requires some linguistic knowledge)."

In terms of concerns, lecturers expressed the additional workload of undertaking feedforward as a key concern. This was not unexpected, and was one of the reasons additional marking time (30 minutes per student additional) was due to be allotted to subjects where the trial took place. (Although a lack of consultancy from a previous head of school meant that some of this time was not allocated correctly, the trials did still take place thanks to the generosity of Jae Major in Bathurst.)

“It is time consuming because you have to grade the same assignment twice: one initially and again when it is resubmitted.”

“Time for the additional work to incorporate some practices, e.g. the feedforward format. Uneven uptake across subjects and across sessions, especially where there are casual staff in coordination roles.”

Lecturers also suggested that assessment design is key when using feedforward, with one lecturer suggesting a very careful scaffolding of assessment tasks throughout the subject to derive maximum benefit. There were also suggestions for clarity of format and to discuss planning with markers, and to use class time to discuss issues that cover a number of students.

“Carefully structure your assessments so they are sequential (you give feedforward on assessment 1 so you can evaluate assessment 1 + 2). If 2 is not linked to 1 then improving 1 seems like busy work, but if they see that improving 1 makes 2 better then they see a use for it.”

“Identify some of the main areas that are commonly raised in the assessment task and discuss with markers the feedforward/suggestions that will be most helpful to students (kind of a bank of ideas to draw on). Have a clear format that markers can use, and spend some class time getting students to engage with the feedforward and planning how to respond in the next assessment.”

4.3.3.2 Students' points of view

Where students found they struggled was where feedback was thin or unclear. They typically found this type of feedback to be of very little use in terms of learning or improving. In the following passage, the student is comparing lecturer Y's strategy of clear feedback with the lack of feedback offered by lecturer X.

“Like, I got five or six out of 10 for this thing. It was nothing big, but X [...] didn't say very much at all. X didn't make any marking, maybe one or two markings on the actual paper and then X has got a word limit of about 20 [...]. X gives you small pointers for this, this and this, and you just go, “If I fix that, I'll get full marks.” Like, I fixed it and I have no idea what my mark is yet. Just the contrast between what Y and X gave us, like Y just gave us all this sweet stuff and I was able to do my essay quite – well, I felt I did it pretty well because of what Y told me.”

When students were asked in the evaluation survey about what types of feedback they would find most useful, the most dominant theme was that they wanted their feedback to provide meaningful suggestions on how to improve in future.

“Letting me know where I went wrong and possibly a suggestion on how to improve.”

“Clear instructions for improvement.”

“Specific explanation of what needs to be improved and examples of how I can do this.”

“Written feedback showing me what I did right then showing areas for improvement.”

There was also an expressed need for face-to-face feedback with lecturers to discuss feedback.

“I prefer to have face to face feedback with the work so the teacher can physically show me what to improve.”

“Written comments and discussion with lecturer about where I can improve.”

“Verbal feedback, on assignments how the marker writes feedback at the end detailing where you went wrong and what you could improve on.”

Awareness of the feedforward strategy (as measured through the question ‘Was a feedforward sheet used in any of your subjects?’) was low when analysed across all three STAR cohorts (36%). It was highest in Bathurst Primary Education students (68%), where EML110 had a clearly described feedforward process, and lowest in Primary Education in Wagga (14%). Exercise Science had 42% awareness. Agreement with statements about feedforward sheets encouraging students to think about feedback (6.9 on a 0-10 scale) and showing how to improve the next assignment (7.1) were good, and also highest in Bathurst Primary Education students (7.9 for thinking about feedback and 8.2 for improving next assignment).

Focus group findings reflected this, in that students were very positive about feedforward and its usefulness.

“For [subject], how we had to write a comment after – because we got our assessment and then she made us write our own feedback on what we need to improve for our next assessment. I thought that was also really useful because you actually had to look at her comments for the next assessment.”

These findings suggest that what students want aligns well with the benefits outlined by lecturers, and with the goals of the feedforward strategy.

4.3.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 4: Feedback strategies should be explicitly focused on providing students with learning about how to improve. ‘Feed forward’ strategies show substantial promise to this end but require additional marking time.

The key consideration to be given to this recommendation is that it will entail more time for marking for first year assignments.

Other considerations should include (where appropriate):

- oral and or one on one feedback to students;
- Explicit teaching of ‘how to understand, interpret and apply’ feedback in the learning pathway in first year curriculum;
- Explicit teaching around the interpretation of rubrics and using them to inform the development and writing of assignments;
- Returning assignments to students in class and discussing them before making grades visible online;
- When providing feedback, lecturers/markers should write individual/personal comments that can be interpreted easily by students; and
- Comments should relate to the rubric/assessable components of the task, and it should be made clear what the student should do next time to achieve better results.

4.4 Orientation

4.4.1 Rationale

Orientation presents a key point at which we can engage students in meaningful ways to transition them into the university student role. As Hu and Kuh argue, “Educationally effective colleges and universities are those that channel students’ energies toward appropriate activities and engage them at a high level in these activities” (Hu & Kuh, 2002, p. 556). Given current orientation procedures at CSU and within Faculty of Education schools, there is certainly scope to increase the number of ‘appropriate activities’ during O-week, with a view to providing students with meaningful insight into becoming a university student.

Orientation fits within the First Year Principles of Transition and Engagement,

4.4.2 Overview

In 2012 and 2013, STAR worked to ensure that the orientation initiatives that took place on Schools Day assisted students in their transition as best as possible.

In 2012, one hour each week was added to EHR101 (in the Bachelor of Exercise Science degree) in 201230 which was used as an orientation hour. As the trial found, although aspects of this strategy were successful, it represented only a small return on investment.

In 2013, STAR developed a 5 minute presentation (available at <http://vimeo.com/61149519>) accompanied by an activity of between 20 minutes and 1 hour (depending on how much time STAR was allocated by those managing the day). The activity outline is included in Appendix D. It is anticipated that this strategy could be both effective and sustainable, as it could be run by course coordinators or other teaching staff.

4.4.3 Evaluation

Orientation is a difficult space, in that many stakeholders have input into what happens during O-Week, creating only limited opportunity for change. That said, the findings in this section provide an insight into students' view of the density of information, and should serve as a catalyst to ensure O-Week activities are well targeted and interactive.

4.4.3.1 Ongoing Orientation in Exercise Science (201230)

The results of the session long orientation trial largely suggest that the strategy as implemented in Exercise Science in 201230 should not be used as guide for ongoing work. The reasons for this are:

- Attendance was very low;
- Students who attended were largely apathetic and unprofessional (including leaving during guest lectures);
- Sessions were not interactive enough;
- Students were unwilling to communicate or participate; and
- Some sessions by visitors were not very engaging.

4.4.3.2 Schools Day activities (201330)

In 2013 STAR formulated O-Week Schools Day activities that were well received by both students and lecturers. Comments on the day typically reflected appreciation of the opportunity for interaction with other students, and a general feeling of positivity and appreciation for the opportunity to think about the future. Students' impressions of the Schools Day as a whole, however, were ambivalent, with only moderate agreement levels (on a 0-10 scale) with statements about the day being fun (5.2) and encouraging students to think about their future (6.0).

Verbatim comments gathered in the survey on the reasons behind this typically reflected 'boredom' or frustration at passively ingesting voluminous and irrelevant information.

"There was very limited activities for my course. Would have liked more!"

"I don't think we needed to know about binge drinking and violence. This was a waste of time to me."

"We didn't really do any activities. Mainly just sat in the lecture hall while some lecturers talked."

Successful aspects of (and suggestions for) Schools Day activities largely related to those which were interactive and allowed students to meet their peers and their lecturers. Suggestions also included calls to reduce the duration of 'boring' sessions.

"Seeing the large amount of keen first years."

"Meeting some of the staff prepared me well for study."

“Actually have some engaging activities that we can participate in, NOT just sitting listening to people talk.”

“More interaction with those in the course and meeting some more lecturers.”

“More focus on course activities rather than dorm activities.”

“The interaction and meeting new people.”

“It should be more practical, less theory and listening.”

“Shorter time, more fun.”

These feelings were reflected in group discussions with students.

“You’re just too excited to be at uni and meeting people, to sit down and listen to the learning. I think maybe just a little overview of the course and then maybe the first lecture of each subject will be more in depth than it would have been in O-Week instead of being in O-Week, maybe. But yeah, I didn’t go because I knew it was boring.”

“I think people just want to have fun in O-Week and meet people and then do the serious stuff later.”

“I remember sitting in that - in S15, the big lecture hall and I can’t remember how long we were there for but I just remember it was quite a long time and it just felt like not much was going in and out because we were kind of just sitting there, being introduced, which was a good thing we needed to do, but just – yeah.”

“I remember they just had a variety of different groups come up and show their thing, like working overseas and PASS and all that, but I just felt it just dragged on too long, so maybe if they split it up throughout the week, like an hour here, an hour there.”

“Basically, every kind of little game or activity that we did during O-Week, whether you were the winner or the loser, no matter what happened, you always ended up saying who you were and what you were at uni for or something like that, and that just broke the ice even more. It was really good.”

Students also pointed out that having experienced peers might be useful.

“Hearing 2-3 year students’ experiences about the course and prac.”

This sentiment was also reflected in evaluations with teaching staff.

“Orientation needs more involvement of senior students. From what I saw of their involvement this year, they’re the ones that first-years listened to the most and created the most impact.”

4.4.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 5: Orientation should focus on showing students what the reality of their university life will entail, rather than bombarding students with information which could be easily communicated on a ‘just in time’ basis.

Given the density of information currently provided, significant consideration should be given to the current structure of Schools Day. The focus in this instance should be on ensuring that the right amount of information is being supplied, because findings indicate that too much irrelevant information is the current norm.

Emphasis should be on ‘commencing mastery of the role of/as a university student’, rather than providing information on the wide range of student support available. The latter can easily be provided in the first weeks of study, and should not crowd Schools Day.

Where there is an identified need for ongoing academic skill development or transition/orientation activities for a cohort, the results of the trial in exercises science would suggest that student engagement may be greater if these kinds of activities are integrated into subjects rather than scheduled on a course basis over and above the subjects. In some cases identifying individual students in need of additional support through their performance on assessment tasks or screening tests, and the targeting of activities at these students may also be a more effective strategy than scheduling such activities for all students.

Recommendation 6. Regular activities focussed on student orientation, transition or academic skill development should in general be integrated into subjects rather than scheduled on a course basis beyond the normal subject timetable.

Recommendation 7. Student engagement in academic skill support activities is likely to be greater if these activities are targeted at individual students based on their performance in assessment tasks and/or screening tests rather than delivered to all students in a cohort.

4.5 Communication with students

4.5.1 Rationale

As stated by Kift in the First Year Curriculum Principles, communication with students is vital if students are to succeed in their first and subsequent years.

“1. Transition

The curriculum and its delivery should be designed to be consistent and explicit in assisting students’ transition from their previous educational experience to the nature of learning in higher education and learning in their discipline as part of their lifelong learning. The first year curriculum should be designed to mediate and support transition as a process that occurs over time. In this way, the first year curriculum will enable successful student transition into first year, through first year, into later years and ultimately out into the world of work, professional practice and career attainment.

Use curriculum time to discuss expectations and responsibilities of learning in higher education and in the discipline (e.g. identify and explain key university

processes and procedures participation in tutorials, attendance at lectures, out-of-class preparation, academic reading, special consideration, grading; draw up student/staff contract on responsibilities; agree statement on what is an 'independent learner'.

Be consistent in all student communications (e.g. in presentation of program material; program language; use of assessment criteria and standards; communicating sense of program progression).

Use a series of email or LMS communications to deliver just-in-time transition information over the course of the first semester" (Kift, 2009, p. yy).

<http://www.csu.edu.au/student/transition/doc/PrinciplesFirstYearTeacher.pdf>

This entails:

- Making the implicit explicit; revealing the hidden curriculum for students lacking cultural capital and without skills to 'read' it.
- Encouraging help seeking behaviour; bridging socio-cultural incongruity (Devlin, 2011).
- Helping bridge the gap between expectations and reality of actual experiences at university (Nelson, Kift & Clarke, 2008).
- A loose basis on the concept of a 'just in time' framework, articulated by Macken and Bishop (2009).

4.5.2 Overview

Between 2012 and 2013, STAR communicated occasionally with students face to face and regularly through subject Interact sites which fed into the STAR courses. The communications consisted of:

- Checklists distributed on paper to first year students in STAR courses in Semester 1 2012.
- Checklists distributed on line to first year students in STAR courses, HPE students, and EC/Primary students during Semester 1 2013 via Interact sites.
- Messages sent to first year students in STAR courses, HPE students and EC/Primary students during Semester 1 2013 via Interact sites.

Examples of these communications can be found in Appendix E.

4.5.3 Evaluation

As a broad headline finding, STAR found that the reach of its student-focused communication was adequate, and that when students did view it they found it moderately useful in navigating their transition into university life. That said, there is certainly room for improvement in their impact.

In the STAR evaluation survey, 78% of students indicated they had seen STAR's weekly Interact messages, with 68% of them having seen at least four messages (and only 3% only having seen one). This reach is good, and would be difficult to improve markedly upon (except in terms of number of messages seen), suggesting Interact may be a good forum for distributing these messages.

However, rating of messages on a 0-10 scale of usefulness yielded a mean of 5.3, suggesting that the actual impact was not as effective as the reach. Verbatim responses on suggestions for improvement to these messages suggests that this may be a function of information overload, with students receiving many Interact messages each day, some of which do not feel targeted towards them. There was also a sense among some students that they did not need the messages.

“Maybe have a flag that outlines the important messages.”

“Not so many messages.”

“Sometimes I don’t know if they are intended for everyone.”

“Great messages for some people. I did not require them though.”

“I just feel like they don’t apply to me a lot of the time.”

“I thought they were just for Bathurst students.” (Wagga Wagga student)

In all, the findings suggest that while there is potential impact in such communications, there is a need to target them appropriately, and to find a way to communicate to students that the messages are of use to them.

4.5.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 8: While STAR communications have had good reach, effort should be made to find out how to best target these messages.

While formal and anecdotal student feedback repeatedly highlights a need for learning about the student role – and STAR evaluation showed that when viewed such materials are positively received – the ability of such materials to reach the target group is hamstrung by students’ lack of engagement with these materials when communicated through typical forums such as Interact.

While face-to-face modes of communication are beneficial, the resources needed to communicate STAR or STAR-like materials may be unrealistic, and represent a potentially poor return on investment. STAR recommends that platforms such as Interact2 or Adobe Connect (or others) are investigated for their potential to reach larger audiences than was possible through Interact1.

When considering the content of communication, resources such as Swinburne’s First Year Checklist (link below) should be included.

<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/equity/First%20Year%20Checklist.pdf>).

4.6 Staff engagement and accountability

4.6.1 Rationale

Given teaching staff are the people who spend the most time with our students, they also have the ability to engender the greatest impact on their study experience. Kift argues:

“Ensuring that institutional reward and recognition structures for both academic and professional staff are aligned with desirable FYE practice and that the requisite incentives for both staff and their managers are provided for them to engage in this important, but presently unappreciated, work with our commencing students” (Kift, 2008, p.6).

Jones and Galloway (2011) note that there are problems associated with academic identity and that there is resistance in higher education to scholarship in learning and teaching. Jones and Galloway’s research investigated academic identity and the “willingness or capacity of academic staff to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning and with ‘pastoral’ roles, as part of their core working identity” (p. 79).

Jones and Galloway (2011) also found that there is a need for staff, including sessional staff who “identify more with a practice-based role” to be mentored, and that linking “research outputs with the scholarship of teaching and learning as a legitimate pathway within academia” is important (p. 81).

In the context of CSU, it is also vital that lecturers understand their students in order to meet their needs. In Cook’s terms, “we need to teach the students we recruit, not the ones we would have liked to recruit” (2007, as cited in Kift, 2008, p. 28).

4.6.2 Overview

4.6.2.1 Engagement

One of STAR’s main goals was to work with teaching staff to support the development of best practice teaching in the first year experience. As such, STAR met regularly (generally monthly during session) with lecturers working with first year students, and undertook other forms of formal and informal communication. These communications included:

- Regular meetings:
 - Generally to discuss what was/was not working, and to address any cohort specific concerns.
- Professional development:
 - In collaboration with Alan Bain and Catherine Newell, STAR developed and ran a professional development session on Smart Tools and the new criterion based (authentic) assessment policies.
- Communicating about students:

- With regards to demographics and other pre-entry characteristics, in addition to measures of behaviour and attitude throughout sessions
- Communicating about pedagogy:
 - STAR maintained regular contact with academic staff through emails, informal discussions and by forwarding pertinent and relevant information from sites such as Faculty Focus (for example, the little reading activity which is excellent).
 - The content of these communications included topics like the need to communicate expectations clearly, to reduce the use of complicated, academic language and to make explicit the links between the subject objectives and assessment for students (constructive alignment).
 - Further, STAR played an important role in communicating with academics about assessment and rubric design. STAR assisted one staff member to rewrite their assessment tasks and to write the rubrics for all tasks using a criterion standards based format.
 - This also included regular communication with teaching staff about:
 - Communicating expectations clearly;
 - Reducing use of complicated, academic language;
 - Making links between subject objectives and assessments explicit for students;
 - Talking about collaborative/cooperative work and teaching students skills for this;
 - Communicating about scaffolding learning;
 - Forwarding pertinent literature/info from sites like Faculty Focus to promote discussion; and
 - Assisting in the design of assessment and marking criteria.
- Forum, Brown Bag and conference presentations:
 - Presentations at CSUed (<https://vimeo.com/53828679>) and the 2013 Faculty Forum (<http://connect.csu.edu.au/p2bnkzlgj80/>)
 - STAR formulated and delivered a Brown Bag presentation in March, 2013 around student demographics, factors in their success and an overview of the STAR work. This – and the discussion surrounding it – led to regular meetings with Jo Reid and involvement in the ESLANITE process, which has allowed the STAR work to be presented to a broader, Faculty wide audience.
- Surveys and other forms of structured and unstructured feedback:

- Including main staff component of overall evaluation strategy

4.6.3 Evaluation

STAR's results in this area were mixed, and appeared to correspond directly with teaching staff members' enthusiasm for the STAR Plan itself. In essence, engagement was best among lecturers and senior staff members who believed in the core factors of STAR (around widening participation), and worst among those who felt (mistakenly, in many cases) that they were either already catering to their students' needs or that 'remedial' efforts were counter to aims relating to quality graduates.

4.6.3.1 Regular meetings:

STAR's meetings with teaching staff throughout 2012 and 2013 were well received by those who attended. Acting as forums to discuss what was/was not working, and to address cohort specific concerns, those lecturers who were enthusiastic about the Plan made good use of them to advance their own skills in and understanding of the first year experience.

In addition, for many sessional staff (who were attending voluntarily), in some cases these meetings marked their only regular point of contact with their course team. In fact, casual staff were among the most enthusiastic about and committed to the STAR Plan, and welcomed the opportunity to interact with other first year lecturers and improve their understanding of their students. Many staff members in this category suggested retaining these meetings as a key priority of STAR and beyond.

“Regular meetings of the teaching team for each semester group to build communication around learning teaching and student progress.”

The key issue apparent in these meetings was the lack of attendance in some of the Primary Education meetings. While workload and timetabling was sometimes raised as a potential cause, lack of attendance was particularly apparent among full time, permanent staff members and was not limited to when they were unavailable.

4.6.3.2 Professional development

STAR ran an evaluation on the collaborative PD session it ran with Alan Bain and Catherine Newell, and results were very positive. The following are the mean levels of agreement with statements relating to the workshop (with median scores in brackets to give you an idea of how agreement levels were distributed). The ratings are on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree:

- Preparedness of facilitators: 9.5
- Helpfulness of facilitators: 9.0
- Relevance of workshop to participants: 8.5
- Objectives were clear to participants: 8.4
- Understanding requirements of activities: 8.4
- Appropriate level of challenged in activities: 8.4
- Enough information prior to workshop: 8.0

Verbatim feedback comments about the most useful aspects of the session included:

“The examples on how to word assignments to make them criterion rich.”

“Having examples shared and analysed, 3 facilitators to rove and work individually clarifying perceptions”

“Conceptual background and rationale for criterion standards.”

“Understanding of what process is being used for authentic assessment at CSU.”

“All important because they're all part of the deepening understanding of the process.”

4.6.3.3 Communicating about students

Both anecdotally and through the evaluation surveys, STAR has found that teaching staff repeatedly identify the importance of regular communication from the STAR team about their students’ demographics and backgrounds in informing their teaching practice. This largely takes the form of being unaware of the specific makeup of their cohort with regards to previous academic achievement (ATAR) and equity-related demographic factors such as first-in-family and SES.

“I’ve gained an appreciation for the impact that being first-in-family to attend university can have on a student. I had never considered the impact of nobody else in a student’s family ever having been to university. I used to make a lot of assumptions about the “cultural capital” students came to CSU with. Both my parents were professors, so I was well supported for university long before I ever started. I’m recognising now that I cannot use my own university experiences to make assumptions about the students I teach.”

“I have realised that my initial expectations what a uni student is, was not the reality.”

Additionally, following a Brown Bag presentation early in 2013 based on data from the whole Faculty, feedback was positive despite some controversy around our discussion of ATAR’s lack of predictive power in our specific context.

4.6.3.4 Communicating about pedagogy

While not all lecturers and staff ‘listened’ to STAR’s pedagogy related communications, those who did listen found it extremely useful. This was particularly apparent among lecturers in Exercise Science, who typically did not come from a background of studying pedagogy, who provided extremely positive feedback on STAR.

*“My extensive involvement with Georgina ****dramatically**** changed how I look at students and understand constructive alignment of assessment with teaching. STAR (or similar) needs to continue!”*

Barriers were apparent among experienced teacher education lecturers, who felt (despite their actual practice not being first year friendly) that STAR was simply rehashing their own ideas.

“I think that I had a good understanding of this particular aspect of PCK (context) before STAR ever started and was doing "it" before we got funding.”

In first year exercise science subject outlines, academics now include a statement like “this assessment enables students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the following subject objectives:”.

4.6.3.5 Forum, brown bag and conference presentations

Although STAR did not conduct specific evaluations of its presentations in broader forums such as CSUed in 2012, its Brown Bag presentation or collaboration with Ged Bourke of BUSS at the 2013 Faculty Forum, anecdotal and other informal feedback suggests that these works incited a great deal of discussion around who our students are, where they come from and what really matters in their first year experiences.

It is apparent that these presentations provided forums in which the lessons of the STAR Plan could be relayed to those outside of the STAR courses within the Faculty and across CSU. This regularly led to new relationships being formed, and for STAR initiatives to be integrated into a broader slice of the University. Key among the impact of these presentations was the role of the Brown Bag in creating a catalyst for STAR’s work with Jo Reid and the ESLANITE initiative.

4.6.3.6 Surveys and other forms of structured and unstructured feedback

Throughout STAR, the team members made themselves available for consultation with staff, and many took this opportunity. In particular, Liam Downing was typically sought out to convey expertise on the research side of STAR, while Georgina Sanger was sought out for her pedagogical expertise. These aspects are mentioned above.

Importantly, STAR also sought to actively gather and record feedback from lecturers and senior staff, and this process has allowed lecturers and senior staff to both express their thoughts on STAR and feel they have some stake in it.

4.6.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 9. Future programs aimed at improving first year students’ transition experiences should be accompanied by a rigorous system of accountability, engagement and support.

Staff should be involved in regular, meaningful communication about students’ demographic characteristics and prior academic achievement.

Wherever possible, sessional staff should be included in these discussions and communications. Even where workload is not available for meetings or other forums, sessional staff should be invited as optional attendees.

Where cross campus teaching is being undertaken, there should be a policy that provides a structure for how this collaboration should occur.

Academic staff should become accountable for engagement with teaching and learning activities in performance review and promotion. Academic staff should be required to provide examples of initiatives trialled, and the outcomes of these.

The following Kift recommendations should also be followed:

- “Recommendation 3 – That top level institutional policies should explicitly acknowledge and be attuned to the transitional learning and support needs of diverse undergraduate first year student cohorts”.
- “Recommendation 4 – That interested academic and professional FYE staff be facilitated to establish and maintain a FYE Community of Practice”. (Kift, 2009, p.3)

5 STAR Initiatives – BIS

5.1 Refinements to orientation residential school

5.1.1 Rationale

Students who commenced study in session 1 of each year are required to attend a compulsory residential school. This is a subject within the course and is designated as INF109. Students who enrolled and commenced study in session 2 undertook two subjects before attending the residential school, INF109, the following year.

5.1.2 Evaluation

For the residential school held in February 2011, questionnaires were devised to allow a comparison of the perspectives of students commencing in 201130 and those of students attending the residential school after having commenced in 201060. The questionnaire also included specific questions for students who had commenced study in session 2 of 2010 to ascertain whether they felt that if a residential school had been conducted at the beginning of their studies, this would have assisted them in their studies in their first session of study. A greater proportion of commencing students found the residential school valuable and there were very positive responses from students commencing in 201060 to questions asking them whether they would have found the residential school more valuable had they attended it in their commencing session. These students also expressed the view that the residential school held at the beginning of their second session of study contained activities which they did not need to attend due to their experiences during their initial session. A summary of responses to these questionnaires has been provided in Appendix N.

Subsequent evaluations where all the attendees are beginning their studies have indicated a high level of satisfaction of residential schools in both sessions in both the academic and social activities provided. The feeling of engagement with the university was also prominently mentioned.

5.1.3 Actions

The advice was conveyed to the INF109 subject coordinator and associate head of school. From this, residential schools are now conducted at the beginning of sessions 1 and 2. There is also the ability for students who have received an exemption to attend residential school at a later time instead of possibly having to wait an entire year to attempt the compulsory subject.

The reasons for allowing exemptions have also been tightened as the evaluations revealed students who attended the residential school strongly indicated how they believed the activities would aid in their forthcoming studies.

Although not directly connected with this initiative, meetings are now also being held in capital cities at the beginning of the year to meet new students in all SIS courses. Anecdotal feedback from participants at these meetings clearly indicates these sessions are of assistance to them in being able to ask questions and meet staff. Coupled with this are the meetings being held in conjunction with study visits in

capital cities for all SIS students. Again, anecdotal feedback and attendance numbers indicate the usefulness of these meetings for students.

5.1.4 Recommendations

Recommendation 10. The session 1 and 2 on campus residential orientation program for the BIS course continue and this type of orientation be considered for other distance courses in the Faculty.

Recommendation 11. Meetings and study visits be scheduled in centres containing large numbers of distance students in a particular course to complement the main orientation programs.

5.2 Criterion referenced and standards based assessment

5.2.1 Rationale

Criterion-based marking provides students with more detailed feedback as to their level of success in each marking criteria of an assignment. Traditionally marking had been undertaken where only short comments were included and a mark given, possibly without any explanation as to what a mark represented in terms of the marking criteria.

This initiative (to assist in the development of rubrics to be used in first year subjects to provide criterion-based marking procedures), was to be run in conjunction with the CDRI Project being undertaken by Associate Professor Alan Bain and as an initiative of the School of Information Studies Curriculum Learning and Teaching Committee (CLTC).

5.2.2 Actions

The STAR Academic Leads and Support Staff within the Faculty of Education attended workshops conducted with Assoc Prof Bain on several occasions where the process of criterion-based marking was explored and how it would fit with the new university-wide Smart Learning Initiative.

At a School of Information Studies retreat in December 2012, the Star Lead presented an introductory workshop on criterion-based marking.

A subsequent decision by the Academic Senate to introduce a new Assessment Policy using criterion-based assessment reinforced the view that this process was an improvement on previous practices. Following this announcement a decision was made that the School of Information Studies would be a part of a pilot project in criterion-based assessment. As part of this pilot project, support was sought from the Faculty of Education to assist staff in transitioning to the new procedures. During 2013 support was available through professional development activities undertaken by senior faculty staff and made available to all SIS staff. This included the introduction of a new assessment and moderation process which is to be integrated into practice over the coming year.

5.2.3 Evaluation

No formal evaluation processes have been used to assess the appropriateness of these sessions for academic staff.

At the regular and informal Community of Practice meetings of SIS staff, the support was acknowledged as being useful. Staff also commented that the support needed to continue beyond 2013 especially in the area of rubric development. This was communicated to the Associate Course Director who was asked to convey the request to school's leadership group.

5.2.4 Recommendations

Ongoing work is needed to support academic staff in their ability to develop effective criterion-based rubrics for subjects, and as part of this there is a need for assessment and moderation procedures to be reviewed in terms of their effectiveness and usefulness. Additionally, continuing moderation by subject teams is needed to ensure assessments in first year subjects be low-stakes assessment and that marking criteria and feedback provide specific support and guidance. For example, this would be assisted through the continued availability of an extra half hour marking time allocated to INF100, the foundation subject of the B Information Studies course to allow markers adequate time to provide increased individualised attention to any specific academic skills issues of first year students. This may reduce the attrition rate of students who fail or not do well in their first assignments.

Recommendation 12. Follow up work be undertaken to scrutinise the assessment in all first year undergraduate subjects to ensure alignment with first year curriculum principles.

5.3 Online support for ICT skill development

5.3.1 Rationale

Some concerns were expressed by staff as the ICT capabilities of students and how the school could assist with their specific concerns especially as all SIS students study in an increasingly online environment. A suggestion was made by the STAR Lead that the development of a web-based support site may provide a means of providing access to useful tutorials which students could access. These concerns later extended to include academic writing and social networking skills. The staff also commented that they wanted support which would target the specific requirements of the subject material in the SIS courses and the needs of students in the course. The site would complement the support already available from through the CSU Learning Support team.

This initiative, which aimed to provide links to online based tutorials which could provide support to students in the areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and academic writing skills, also became an activity as part of the school's Curriculum Learning and Teaching Committee (CLTC) program.

5.3.2 Actions

An audit across all subjects was conducted with the cooperation of teaching staff as to what software and skills were required to be used by students during their course of study.

From this list a search was conducted to locate and select appropriate sites which contained tutorials which students could easily access. The sites were added to an e-platform known as LiveBinders. The site has a number of tabs which were renamed with subject specific titles e.g. word processing, essay writing, blogging, etc

The ICT sites contain a number of Microsoft Tutorials on basic skills which involve word processing in particular as these were considered essential in all subjects. Other links were to social networking sites which contained self-help tutorials to assist in the establishment of such applications as a blogging site which is to be used across a number of subjects, especially in the preparation of reflective e-portfolios.

The requirements of the academic skills involved searching a number of university sites, especially those with a large cohort of distance education students. In particular, basic skills such as essay writing, grammar, report writing, study skills, and report writing were targeted. Links to relevant online tutorials were added to the LiveBinder site.

A decision was subsequently made to transfer the links to a LibGuide site housed within the CSU Library site. This would ensure the site was maintained by CSU and that any additions and/or alterations could be undertaken by anyone on the school staff. The availability of the LibGuide site will commence as from the beginning of the 2014 academic sessions.

5.3.3 Evaluation

A survey of staff revealed that only a few had used the site. Those who had reported the students appreciated an overall satisfaction of the support offered to students, especially those in the beginning stages of their relevant course.

Some staff indicated that while they were aware of the site and its possible benefits, had not used it in the preceding session. Further promotion, as noted below, may address this issue.

One staff member commented that the site would be useful for those students studying in Hong Kong whose second language is English and may have difficulties with some of the language conventions required in their studies.

5.3.4 Recommendations

It is acknowledged that the ICT skill development site needs to be reviewed and continually developed and improved with the addition of links to new tutorials as required. Importantly, engagement with teaching staff (continuing and sessional) is needed to ensure that the site is aligned to their teaching needs and to ensure that they promote the materials to students.

While some technical-based subjects already have specific skills development included in the subject material, the integration of basic skills in both ICT and academic skills is important for all first year subjects. Drawing on a central site across all subjects would help to ensure that any required skills are included and addressed within the relevant subject material. The CLTC could oversee that integration of such skills across the course with subject teams advised to address the integration when subjects are being revised or updated.

Recommendation 13. The online academic and ICT skill development resources developed for BIS students be reviewed and refined in consultation with subject teams and links to these resources be integrated into subject materials as appropriate.

5.4 Online synchronous communication between staff and students

5.4.1 Rationale

Students who study through the distance education mode experience an increased level of difficulty in communicating with lecturing staff due to the demands of online communication. Being able to talk with a lecturer increases the efficiency of any communication in comparison with the written word. Being able to talk with other students is also of benefit to students who can feel a sense of isolation when working 'alone'. The use of online synchronous communication systems can aid in students developing clearer understanding of assignment requirements and feeling a sense of belonging with fellow students.

5.4.2 Actions

With the implementation of Adobe Connect within the university, it was decided that support would be provided by the STAR Academic Lead to the INF100 subject coordinator in the use of Adobe Connect within the subject.

A session was conducted employing a PowerPoint presentation and audio link where students were invited to work through an academic skills tutorial involving essay writing and referencing to the CSU APA style. The session was conducted in the early evening to maximise the number of students who could attend online. Instructions on how to setup their computers and the hardware requirements were supplied one week before the session. Approximately 20 students attended this initial meeting. The meeting was recorded in order that the presentation could be reviewed at a later time or, for those who were unable to attend at the designated time, they could view the presentation at a more suitable time.

5.4.3 Evaluation

Students who accessed the synchronous sessions or viewed the recorded session at a later time were asked to send an email to the STAR Lead conveying their thoughts on the use of such technologies. Ten students responded with unanimous agreement that the presentation had been highly useful and that the ability to speak directly with a staff member was regarded as vital, especially considering they had recently begun study and the verbal support and reassurances were comforting. These comments matched comment and feedback provided by students in other courses who have also been involved in activities using Adobe Connect.

5.4.4 Recommendations

It is recommended that the use of Adobe Connect becomes an essential tool in all subjects and that regular online synchronous sessions are conducted as required by all teaching staff. This will also support the Faculty of Education proposed commitments that students will regularly engage in asynchronous communication as well as having the opportunity to regularly engage in synchronous communication with academic staff. Support could be provided through the school's Educational Designer, focusing upon operating skills, presentation of material to an online audience and digital etiquette.

Recommendation 14. Consistent with the Faculty's online learning commitments, all first year distance subjects should include regular online synchronous sessions, and academic staff should be provided with support from educational designers and/or other staff to assist them in incorporating these sessions into their subjects.

It is also recommended that the use of video and other multi-media formats is investigated as a means of subject delivery. It is clear that students appreciate the increased effectiveness of communication links when a voice can be heard and preferably a face can also be seen. Distance education presents difficulties for some students whose learning style includes social interaction and through the increased use of audio and video communication tools, students will experience an improved learning environment which may include social interaction with fellow students.

The use of the CSU Media Services could be utilised to produce high quality videos, podcasts etc of subject material and support can also be obtained from the Education Support Coordinator and the school's educational designer. These formats would be used to support subject content and are known to increase to efficiency and effectiveness of communication.

At present there is some use of YouTube for video presentations. This platform is outside the control of CSU. It is recommended that videos produced in relation to course subject material be stored in-house, possibly through the use of DOMS, and linked to subject material as required. Other technologies that should be utilised include the use of Captivate in producing vodcasts, Audacity in producing podcasts and CSU Replay for the creation of online lecture material.

While some students have difficulties due to their location and internet bandwidth, this situation will improve over time as the NBN is installed and comes online.

The use of technologies mentioned above would also support the proposed set of commitments as outlined in the Faculty of Education Online Learning Communities discussion paper of August 2013.

5.5 Early identification of at-risk students

5.5.1 Rationale

Initially this initiative was to be targeted towards first year students. It has been widened to include all students in both the B Information Studies and the M Information Studies.

Analysis of data of fail results (FL or FW) or approved withdrawals (AW) from all 201330 subjects indicates that many of the students who have not been successful have multiple results including FL, FW and/or AW. These results affect the overall progress rate of students across this school. It was also noted that many of the students who received either FL or FW grades had enrolled with credits from previous study, most likely TAFE.

Analysis of results across two years of first year subjects (one academic year) does not indicate that factors such as low socio-economic background, first in family at university or ATSI background have any effect on results in first year subjects.

5.5.2 Actions

Results from all subjects studied in session 1 of 2013 were analysed and all fail and approved withdrawal results were recorded on a spreadsheet.

Any students with significant fail or approved withdrawal records were identified using a colour code.

Enrolment information for session 2 was located and added to the spreadsheet. The aim was to identify the 'at risk' students and their next enrolled subject(s). The information would then be passed onto the subject coordinator of the identified session 2 subjects with the view that the subject coordinator would contact the student(s) identified as being 'at risk' as soon as possible to ascertain if any support could be offered as early as possible to reduce the risk of failure or withdrawal, especially for students who may have failed or withdrawn from the subject previously.

Due to the time taken to collect the data of subject results, the time taken to record and analyse the results and add session 2 subjects, the final stage of the process was not carried out. It did, however, supply the Associate Course Director with a database which she could use to provide background information if meeting with a student who has expressed concern about their progress.

With an improved method of data collection and recording developed, it is anticipated that identification and recording of 'at risk' students will occur at a faster rate in future sessions.

5.5.3 Evaluation

The Associate Course Director has indicated that the database, in its present early form, is highly useful when communicating with students who are experiencing difficulties as it provides background information as the student's academic progress. The information has assisted her in developing plans for students in terms of supporting their continuing progress and specialisation choices. The information has also provided a guide to subject areas which individual students would appear to be experiencing difficulty.

5.5.4 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Associate Course Director continues to monitor at risk students through an analysis of student results which indicate a continuing pattern of failure, either FL or FW, or subject withdrawal, AW. Communication could be

established with students who have multiple occurrences of these results as a matter of priority to ascertain if any assistance can be provided to the student who has a pattern of continuing study which may result in eventual exclusion. The subject coordinators could be informed as soon as possible into a session as to any students who could be considered at risk of failure due their history of fails and/or withdrawals. Subject coordinators could contact identified at risk students directly within the early stages of a session to ascertain if any assistance may be provided. This may be of particular importance to any student who has previously failed the subject. These recommendations can also be broadened to encompass other courses within the faculty, as follows.

Recommendation 15. In addition to university wide efforts to derive ‘at risk’ indicators there is value in course specific analysis to identify patterns of activity/engagement or subject completion/performance common to students who withdraw.

Recommendation 16. Follow ups with students ‘at risk’ are likely to be more effective if carried out by Subject Coordinators or Course Directors but caution is needed given the time commitment this might require.

Recommendation 17. Regardless of who has responsibility for follow up with students ‘at risk’ better mechanisms are needed to provide timely information to Subject Coordinators and Course Directors about the engagement status and performance of students in the subjects and courses they are responsible for.

5.6 Promotion of Studylink subjects for beginning students

5.6.1 Rationale

Students entering the B Information Studies course have a median age of 38. This could mean a student may be:

- Commencing tertiary level study for the first time
- Returning to university level study, previously having studied a number of years previously
- Have studied at TAFE level, completing a library certificate or diploma level
- As above and now returning after a number of years to study for a professional qualification
- While having undertaken previous study, not succeeded due to poor academic skills

In summary, this could mean a student commences study having a background of no previous study, a long break between tertiary study and/or academic poor skills.

5.6.2 Actions

A welcoming email was developed and posted to all commencing students before their studies began. Included was information listing relevant Studylink subjects which were regarded as suitable for students in the BIS course.

5.6.3 Evaluation

Students were contacted asking for comment about the usefulness of any Studylink subject they may have studied. The response rate was minimal with only four responses received. Three of those who did reply either commented that once formal study began they did not have the time to continue the Studylink subject (though they could see the value in undertaking a subject in preparation for study) and discontinued the subject. For the one who completed a subject, the experience was found to be highly useful.

5.6.4 Recommendations

Recommendation 18. Studylink subjects be advertised to incoming students as soon as possible after acceptance of their offer, to allow their completion before the commencement of the course.

Recommendation 19. Students, who exhibit a particular difficulty with academic skills, as exhibited in subject-based assessment and activities, should be advised to undertake relevant Studylink subjects ideally during the optional session 3 period.

Recommendation 20. Evaluation of student perceptions of Studylink subjects and analysis of the performance of students who complete them is needed to provide a stronger empirical base for judgements about their value for students in specific courses.

6 STAR Initiatives – Birth to 5 Education

6.1 Background to the course

The B.Ed. (birth to five) degree is a Distance course designed for diploma trained child care workers/educators in children's services to gain a teaching degree while still working in paid employment. Most students study part-time taking one or two subjects each session. Many of the students have family commitments as well as working and having not attended university prior to the degree are not aware of the requirements of university study. Working in the profession they do and many of them living in inner city areas, many of these students come from low socio-economic backgrounds and have not had any experience of higher education in their families.

6.2 Face to face Orientation sessions

6.2.1 Rationale

As the students in this degree are all distance and there is no requirement in any of the subjects to attend any face to face sessions the opportunity to meet with the Course Director and some teaching staff and to hear about the requirements of the degree, is seen as a key general component of the First Year Curriculum Principles.

An overview of the degree is given by the Director, followed by one of the lecturers giving details of the course structure and an overview of each of the subjects available. Student services staff attend to explain the services they offer and to physically go through the Student Support and the individual subject Interact sites.

6.2.2 Implementation

Face to face Orientation sessions were introduced in Session 1 of 2012 and offered again in Session 2 2012, Session 1 2013 and Session 2 2013. In January 2012 a session was offered in Sydney to students enrolling in the B.Ed, (birth to five) degree for the first time.

Attendance records from sessions

Sydney - Parramatta	February 2012	84
	June 2012	33
	February 2013	59
	June 2013	38
Port Macquarie	February 2013	8
Griffith	February 2013	2
Parkes	February 2013	2
Albury	February 2013	9
Sydney - Parramatta	June 2013	29

On-line orientation was made available for Sessions 3 in 2012 and 2013 as there are less students commencing in Session 3. Invitations were sent to students commencing in Session 3 2012 to attend the face to face session in 2013 if they wanted.

6.2.3 Results

Evaluations were taken at each session and these showed an overwhelming appreciation of the sessions and that students felt that they gained from attending the sessions (see Appendix L and Appendix M).

Analysis of results taken from students commencing study in the 3 sessions of face to face orientation in 201230,201260 and 201330 indicate that students are more successful if they attend.

	Attended any of 201230, 201260 or 201330 orientations			
	Did not attend		Did attend	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
GPA	2.76	4.00	3.40	4.14

	Attended any of 201230, 201260 or 201330 orientations			
	Did not attend		Did attend	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
AS	640	74.0%	127	83.6%
GD	1	0.1%	0	0.0%
GR	7	0.8%	0	0.0%
WC	210	24.3%	25	16.4%
WT	5	0.6%	0	0.0%
X2	2	0.2%	0	0.0%

The number of people attending sessions held in places other than Sydney does not warrant continuation. It would be more beneficial to offer an on-line orientation for these students. Weekends need to be offered as most students work full-time in child care services and would be unable to attend during week days or evenings.

Costs incurred:

Venue booking fee	\$450.00	+ catering of \$10 a head
Travel costs	\$250.00	Car hire to travel to Sydney
Accommodation	\$220.00	2 rooms for staff
photocopying	\$25.00	Course structure

6.2.4 Recommendation:

Recommendation 21. Sydney orientation sessions continue to be offered in Session 1 and 2 for commencing BEd(B-5) students and these types of sessions held in centres containing large numbers of students in a course be considered for other distance courses without an on campus orientation program.

6.2.5 Implications:

There is a cost incurred in offering these sessions – travel, accommodation, and catering. Staff needed to travel as well as organise to work at weekends.

6.3 On-line Orientation sessions

6.3.1 Rationale

As these students enrol in the degree from all over Australia and some from elsewhere in the world there is no requirement in any of the degree subjects to attend any face to face sessions and the opportunity to meet with the Course Director and some teaching staff and to hear about the requirements of the degree is not possible. It is seen as a key general component of the First Year Curriculum Principles that some sort of Transition is offered to students especially those who are entering the degree with industry experience but not academic experience.

6.3.2 Implementation

CSU replay offers students the opportunity to see and hear from the Course Director and other lecturing staff about the degree and about the university. By the use of a number of short replays students are able to see and hear about individual subjects and receive some instruction on how to use Interact as well as being shown the student services offered by the university.

6.3.3 Result

Anecdotal results indicate that students really appreciate receiving this information especially if they had wanted to attend the face to face sessions but had been unable to because of distance or other circumstances.

1. *Thank you for posting this orientation. It has helped me to understand the degree better and sort of meeting Carol was really good.*

Received April 2013

2. *I really liked being able to do the on-line orientation as this has allowed me not to feel left out by not being able to go to Sydney because I live in Burke.*

Received April 2013

3. *I had no idea that the university offered all these things to help me to study. That is really good and I hope I get to use them./*

Received April 2013

4. *Listening was good but I would like to see the people – it helps me.*

Received July 2013

6.3.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 22. That online orientation sessions be provided in all distance courses without a compulsory on campus orientation program, ideally as synchronous sessions recorded for students unable to attend.

6.3.5 Implications

This resource has already been developed but needs to be updated and reviewed regularly. It needs to have video shots of each of the lecturers and tutors prepared but this should be able to be maintained at a minimal cost in time.

6.4 Low stakes assessment items

6.4.1 Rationale

The low stakes assessment is a key component of the First Year Curriculum Principles. Its idea is that it will give students early formative feedback to assist them in future assessments during the session.

6.4.2 Implementation

It was trialled in one subject EEB309 – Wellness and Wellbeing for 3 sessions in 2013. The assessment was designed to assist students in their first subject in

university the opportunity to do a small assessment task worth on 10% that looked closely at their academic writing and referencing skills.

For this task you will need to have covered the material in Modules 1 and 2, and the associated readings. There are two parts of the task – Part A and Part B.

Part A requires you to create a compulsory posting to the Forum that relates to your interviews.

Interview two people to explore the concepts of wellness and wellbeing in relation to their everyday lives. Choose people who you feel comfortable with and who will not be threatened by the questions below. Try to ensure that they respond genuinely rather than produce responses that they feel you may be seeking.

Interview questions

- How would you define wellness and wellbeing?
- Do you experience wellness and wellbeing in your life at present?
- How do you achieve this? What is inhibiting you in achieving this?
- What value do you think contemporary society places on wellness and wellbeing?
- You could read the points on page 10 of Donatelle, (your next reading) and ask your participants to comment on these.

After the interviews, reflect on the responses provided and think about them in relation to what you have read in the subject to date and your own ideas of wellness and wellbeing. Post your thoughts briefly to the forum thread entitled Wellness & wellbeing interviews

This posting will not be marked but is a necessary step to Part B

Part B requires you to write a 300-word critical reflection. A critical reflection is the process of analysing, reconsidering and questioning. You will compare and contrast what your interviewees have said, in the light of what you have read in the Neville reading (1st week reading). For example, you might like to think about whether the ideas of your interviewees were similar or different to the ideas of Neville. Based on your interviews, do you agree or disagree with Neville’s ideas? Why?”

6.4.3 Results

With students being enrolled by distance and there being a high attrition rate in the subject it was noted that some students who elected to withdraw, did do this first assignment and therefore received a Fail for the subject. This also gave them a cost which otherwise they may not have received.

Gradebook examples

Student number	Ass 1	Ass 2	Ass 3	Total Mark	Grade

11520592	7			7	FL
11532816	7			7	FL
11374815	8			8	FL
11502530	7			7	FL
11534062	9			9	FL
11531564	10			10	FL

A subject offered in 201290, EEB423 had the following attrition rates:

Enrolled 259 at commencement in November 2013. First assignment due on 22nd December and by then 55 students had withdrawn. A low stakes assessment item would have forced these students to engage in a subject that they were choosing to withdraw from and to continue with it in 2014.

Examples from student messages:

1. *Thanks Celia for the support you have given me but I am just under too much pressure at the moment to do the rest of the subject. See you next year.*

Received 29 Nov 2013

2. *I am enjoying the content but there is too much reading for me at the moment.*

Received 2 Dec 2013

2. *I'm drowning at work and my kids are all sick. I'll re-enroll in 2014. Thanks for the help but no go for me this time.*

Received 8 Dec 2013

6.4.4 Recommendation:

Recommendation 23. Further trials of early low stakes assessment be undertaken in distance subjects but with caution to ensure that unintended consequences relating to student withdrawal or inability to withdraw do not occur.

6.4.5 Evaluation

Lecturers and tutors involved in the subject EEB309 all reported that they thought the concept was a good idea and they thought that it helped the students to understand what was involved in university study. They did agree, though, that it was very hard on

students who chose to attrite that they received a Fail and had to pay for a subject they did not engage in.

Wyverne Smith: “This seemed like a good idea when you first suggested incorporating it but it has turned out to be a very high stakes rather than low stakes for students who have decided not to continue the subject.”

Laura Piazza: “I feel that it is very unfair for some of my students who have undertaken the first task in the 3rd week of the session before the census date to be penalised with a Fail when they realised that they could not complete the subject.”

6.4.6 Implications

Therefore it would appear to be appropriate to offer the assessment task as a support for students who want to assess their own academic writing skills rather than making it an assessable part of a subject.

6.5 Web site

6.5.1 Rationale

Many of the students choosing to enrol in this degree are working in child care services on a face-to-face basis with children all day. Therefore they are not using computers constantly and many do not have high technological skills to navigate around the university website.

Student 1: “I have just enrolled in the degree but can’t find where to enrol in subjects or what the degree looks like.”

Student 2: Thanks for putting up the website. That is really useful. I can now find what I need. So much easier than having to find my way around the CSU pages.

6.5.2 Implementation

Discussion was held with the ED about the best resource for students in this degree to have to be able to find out course information. There was a Forum on which postings were made but that is very busy with nearly 700 students enrolled. An Interact site was discussed but at the time Interact was not remaining. It was therefore decided that with the support of Dan Given a web site would be the most advantageous for all students to access useful information easily and consistently.

6.5.3 Results

The web site was established in early 2013 and students emailed to advise them of the web address. It is within the CSU system but by emailing the direct address it gave students direct access. The web address was also posted on each of the first year subject Interact sites

6.5.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 24. An Interact site be developed for the B-5 course including information and academic support resources developed specifically for this course as well as links to more generic resources provided by other parts of the university.

6.5.5 Evaluation

This site has proved very successful and students are accessing it regularly.

“The page has had 145 ‘unique page views’ which means it was access that many times. There were 187 views total, which means some people came back soon after leaving (I think it is within ½ hour it doesn’t log a second ‘unique’ hit).

So, it is getting some traffic. Cheers Dan “

Email received March 2013

6.5.6 Implications

It needs to be maintained and updated regularly to ensure that students gain the right information when accessing the web page.

It would be nice to add more to the page such as links to useful resources for early childhood professionals and professional organisation links.

6.6 Subject Coordinators

6.6.1 Rationale

Students are required to undertake the first 4 subjects in the degree before they have the opportunity to select electives and do any professional experiences. This is recommended because the Course Director believes that students need the basic knowledge supplied in these subjects prior to undertaking more diverse subjects. Regular members of staff are able to support the students in their transition to university study and advise them about options and requirements of which sessional staff may not be aware. Regular staff are also able to access emails and forums etc on a consistent basis that sessional staff find difficult. This means that questions from students can be answered quickly and correctly in a prompt fashion thus avoiding students choosing to attrite because of lack of support.

6.6.2 Implementation

During 2012 and 2013 the first 4 subjects in the degree were all coordinated by full-time staff who were able to give the students the support that they needed. This may not always be possible due to subject being offered in all three sessions and the unavailability of full-time staff.

6.6.3 Results

It is not possible to gain any actual figures to say that full-time staff are better at coordinating and teaching these early subjects because we don't have any way of taking figures. These are some comments from students in subjects undertaken with full-time staff coordinating.

1. For EMC305 *“I just wanted to take the time to say Thank you so much for all your guidance and assistance. I handed in my assignment on Sunday morning feeling that it was fulfilling the marking criteria and in your words 'on the right track'. I have completed a degree and started another and never once has a subject co-ordinator taken so much time to help me in any of these courses. You are wonderful at what you do and I just wanted to thank you for that.”*
2. For EEP417 *“First I like to let you know how well this subject is being presented and I also thank you for the efficiency it was put up. It's really great because it gave me time to get my head around it and to get myself organised, which for me is a necessity in order to feel confident in tackling new things. I like to thank you for all the time and effort that you all would have put in presenting this subject so beautifully. I am really looking forward to it as it is something that I love to do, the planning, evaluating and following through with children's interests.”*
3. EML302 *“I have valued this subject greatly and look forward to hopefully having you again as a coordinator, you do such a great job! From the resources to your modules and your constant positivity, I have thoroughly enjoyed your subject”*
4. EMC305 *“I would also like to add that this has to be the easiest of the subjects so far- not because it isn't challenging or difficult but because of the way it is prepared. You have added so much information and have clearly gone out of your way to make the subject as informative and interesting as it is. The positive encouragement provided by you and the tutors is great! “*

6.6.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 25. Wherever possible continuing or contract academic staff members are allocated to convene or coordinate subjects in the first year of courses to ensure awareness of and cooperation with Faculty and course initiatives to support first year students.

6.6.5 Evaluation

This recommendation could be very difficult to achieve in this degree because, at present, the only staff actually employed are the Director and one full-time lecturer. Other members of the academic early childhood qualified teach into the degree but many subjects are coordinated and taught by sessional staff. Also because the subjects are offered 2 and 3 times each year there are no regular academics who can teach subjects that often and so sessional staff are actively involved in the design, teaching and updating of these subjects.

There are some comments from sessional staff employed regularly as follows:

1. Virginia: *“I really enjoy teaching Wellness and Wellbeing when Amy or Wyverne are coordinating it. I have coordinated it 2 times now over Session 3 but I find it quite stressful because I am worried that I cannot give the students the time they need sometimes and I can’t always answer as quickly as I would like to and as the students deserve.”*
2. Wyverne: *“I found that when I worked full-time I had plenty of time to support the students but as a casual I do not and am not paid enough to put in the extra hours needed”.*
3. Julie: *“I really enjoy tutoring in a subject but I do not feel that I have the knowledge of the university processes to be a coordinator”*
4. Nicky: *“I like being involved but I need someone like Celia to answer all the questions that I don’t know the answers to.”*
5. Donna *“Thank you Amy for all the enclosed...particularly the summary of advice for a first timer. I do think it is essential to keep us as tutors on a consistent track and for me confidence in what I am doing and in fairness to the students. I have been treading very carefully on mine and their behalf! I have found your main forum a fund of information. Your replies to queries have shored up my understanding and knowledge. Many of the queries run a similar track. It is obvious to me that reassurance is a major need as the fact of isolation can be quite daunting for many students out there. I am hearing so much appreciation and relief from the support you are giving and I feel quite a team with you in this. The person at the helm is so important! I don't think they can believe the amount and type of help they are getting in this subject. It is so good to hear the students reaction*

and enthusiasm for the subject.....many comments about the way the subject is set up.”

6.6.6 Implications

If the university can see the value of employing full-time staff to teach the first four subjects then a commitment will have to be made to recognise this in staffing committees and with recognition of staff only teaching in 2 sessions out of 3 each year.

6.7 Synchronous Communications

6.7.1 Rationale

Students working in this degree are almost always working full-time or part-time in the child care sector. They have chosen this career because they enjoy working with people in an active participatory way. Staff work all day with the children, interacting with them and with parents and other staff with little written communication or reading being a part of the role of educator on a daily basis. Although they need to keep up to date with current research and also keep records of the children’s progress this is a minimal part of the profession.

6.7.2 Implementation

Chat Rooms were established in each of the first 4 subjects with lecturers and tutors involving themselves for between 1 and 2 hours per week to discuss live with students the work they were learning. Adobe Connect sessions were held in one subject EML302, each week with students calling in as they needed.

6.7.3 Results

It is not possible to ascertain if the results for these students has improved but from comments from students it is obvious that they like the live involvement with lecturers and tutors.

1. *“Talking with Kellie each week on the Chat Room has really helped me to see the relevance of understanding about literacy with very young children. I didn’t get it from just reading the stuff in the modules.”*
2. *“I liked the Chat Rooms with Wyverne. She would pose a question and then we could all discuss it. Like really being at uni proper.”*
3. *“I would just like to take the opportunity to thank you for having the live sessions. I know I speak for many people when I tell you how much I appreciate your guidance and help during these sessions. There is a big*

difference between the subjects where we feel we are in contact with the tutors and others as to how much I understand and digest all the info”

Chart of the engagement in Chat Rooms

Times	Tutor 1	Num	Tutor 2	Num	Tutor 3	Num
6.30-8.00	Week 2	8	Week 6	7	Week 11	9
7.30 - 8.30	Week 2	10	Week 6	12	Week 11	10
8.30 – 9.30	Week 2	12	Week 6	15	Week 11	14

6.7.4 Recommendation

The following recommendation emerging from the BIS course is also supported by the trials undertaken in the BEd(B-5) course:

Recommendation 14. Consistent with the Faculty’s online learning commitments, all first year distance subjects should include regular online synchronous sessions, and academic staff should be provided with support from educational designers and/or other staff to assist them in incorporating these sessions into their subjects.

Consistent with the online learning commitments, however it is important that such sessions are made optional for students because many distance students find it difficult to attend sessions at any specific time due to work and family commitments. This leads to the following additional recommendation:

Recommendation 26. Synchronous sessions introduced within subjects should be optional rather than compulsory and should be recorded or captured for later viewing/reading by students unable to attend.

6.7.5 Evaluation

In talking with the lecturers/tutors in subjects involved they found it to be very useful and enjoyed the time they spent talking with the students. None mentioned that it was difficult or not valuable.

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1. The time of the day needs to be assessed as we found students liked later in the evening than earlier.
2. I really liked the live chats and I felt I got to know the students so much better when they just chatted with me and did not feel that they had to have the answers before they wrote something
3. I could have chatted for much longer as when they started they did not want to stop. I could have a chat room every night I think but that is just not possible

6.7.6 Implications

Staffing of this type of support and communication is an ongoing issue for the degree. Casual lecturers are only paid for ½ hour per student per session so if lecturers have 60 students then they are only paid for 30 hours per session of consultation. If they undertake 1.5 hours of chat room each week then that is 18 hours of their time utilised and thus giving them only 12 hours during the session for emails, tutorial support etc.

6.8 Professional Development

6.8.1 Rationale

This degree has 26 subjects offered. There is a non teaching director, one full-time lecturer and the remainder of the degree is taught by other academics from within the faculty and many casual staff. The number of students enrolled in each subject can vary from several hundred to about 50. This means that most subjects will have more than one teaching staff member and be coordinated by another (often a casual themselves). As much as it is good to keep the same staff on each subject this is not possible because of the frequency that subjects are offered and also because casuals are not available all the time and academics often are needed to teach in other areas or are undertaking research projects.

Overall the degree has some 50 casual staff teaching into subjects are varying times and although they come with qualifications and credentials in the field of early childhood they often do not know the university procedures which include embedding literacy learning into subjects. They are also unaware of the criterion based marking and moderation systems that the university uses.

6.8.2 Implementation

During the time of the STAR project I, as the Academic Lead for the degree, have attempted to undertake this role with as many casual lecturers as possible. Each session I have discussed with any new staff their expected role within the degree and explained to them what the Birth to Five degree aims to offer students and the support that we need to be able to offer them, especially in the first 4 subjects. The full-time staff in the first 4 subjects have also been very supportive of casual lecturers and have been willing and able to explain fully to their casuals how best to interact with students.

2013

<i>Lecturer</i>	<i>New tutors</i>	<i>Continuing tutors</i>
Amy McDonald	3	10
Fran Press	4	3
Kellie Tribolet	1	6
Wyverne Smith	2	5
Lisa-Maree Bayne	1	3
Virginia Sexton	0	3

6.8.3 Results

I am not able to give any results for this recommendation because we have never had any professional development for casual staff paid for by the university. I can advise unofficially, and without documentation, that staff who have been employed full-time and then transfer to casual find the university processes much easier to work within.

6.8.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 27. All new continuing, contract and sessional staff allocated to teach first year subjects be provided with professional development to ensure that they are aware of the needs of first year students and the transition and retention approaches being implemented in the Faculty, School or course.

6.8.5 Evaluation

None undertaken

6.8.6 Implications

Because of the number of students in this degree and the number of times that subjects are offered it is necessary to have a large number of casual staff involved in teaching into the degree. If this recommendation is accepted it will be necessary to offer either a face to face or a distance form of professional development to assist new lecturers/tutors to learn the university processes for our distance students.

6.9 Assignment booklet

6.9.1 Rationale

Most of the students entering this degree have already completed a Diploma in Children's Services and are working on a daily basis with young children. The diploma, while being a rigorous practical qualification, does not equip the students for university study in regards to reading, different genres of writing or referencing. Lecturers and tutors, particularly those in the first 4 subjects, find that they need to offer a lot of support and scaffolding to students to assist them to learn these skills. A generic booklet that is available to all students to access in each subject would assist by acting as a model to students of how assignments could be constructed to reach university standard.

6.9.2 Implementation

A booklet has been designed based on one prepared by Monash University and is now available to lecturers to put into their Interact sites so that students can access it easily and also lecturers and tutors and advise students to access it when they have questions about how to prepare assignments and how to reference.

6.9.3 Results

Informal feedback from staff has advised that this is a useful resource that they have found has saved them time so they don't have to tell each student where to go to find the answer they wanted.

1. Wyverne: *"Thanks for preparing the booklet Celia. Students are now able to see what I want them to do especially with referencing."*
2. Donna: *"I have found that the students like to refer to the Assignment Booklet. They get to see what to do. Sometimes they haven't known what to do and haven't known what questions to ask."*

Student 1: *"Thanks Wyverne for putting up the Assignment help booklet. It was good to see what I had to do instead of having to hope for the best."*

Student 2: *"I wish the booklet to help with setting out different types of*

assessments had been available last year. I might not have made the mistakes I made if that had been around.”

6.9.4 Recommendation

Recommendation 28. The online booklet to support B-5 students in completion of assessment tasks should be further refined and links to the booklet should be integrated into all subjects in the degree.

6.9.5 Evaluation

No realistic evaluation undertaken as it didn't seem appropriate

6.9.6 Implications

If this type of booklet is to remain useful and be used by lecturers it must be reviewed and rewritten regularly as changes are made in say - Assessment policy or – Marking timelines etc. Therefore some sort of workload points need to be allocated to someone within the degree to be prepared to review it each session and ensure it is current.

6.10 Electronic welcome videos

6.10.1 Rationale

As reported several times before in this document the students in this degree are people who work with children and adults on a face to face basis. They have chosen this career because they like working in that environment. Enrolling to do a Distance degree offers many of them a challenge to work on-line in an environment by themselves. In discussion with lecturers they have advised that many of the students would really like to know what their lecturers and tutors look and sound like and then they would feel as though they knew them when they were reading comments that they had written on assignments or in chat rooms. Each of the subjects has a Welcome message on the Home Page of the Interact site and a photo of each of the lecturers and tutors but a video recording would increase the personal contact that students feel they have with their lecturers.

6.10.2 Implementation

This is still in the planning process. Many of our casual staff are reticent to video themselves and it will be necessary to organise with the full-time staff to do a recording first and then the casual staff may be more prepared. Mechanisms have been researched to actually do the recording for staff who never come onto campus and mobile phones have been accepted as the easiest method to use. This will be introduced in 2014/30.

6.10.3 Results

As this has not been implemented there are no results for this yet.

6.10.4 Recommendation

It is recommended that welcome electronic clips be made by each subject coordinator and tutor to introduce themselves to students to each subject. This could be implemented by using a tool such as CSU Replay or alternatively it could be delivered as a synchronous session in Adobe Connect and then subsequently uploaded for viewing by other students.

Recommendation 29. Support be provided to subject coordinators in first year distance subjects to produce a welcome video either as a standalone resources or as a recorded synchronous session.

6.10.5 Evaluation

This will be undertaken at the end of 2014/30 to see if students like this informal way of getting to know lecturers and tutors.

6.10.6 Implications

Subject coordinators will need to take the responsibility of communicating with the teaching staff and ensuring that they do a recording of themselves prior to the session commencing so that it can be placed on the Interact site and students can access it and feel a relationship can develop with their tutor prior to the session commencing.

6.11 Concluding comments

The main aims of the project have been addressed as follows:

- To assist LSES in particular, in their transition into university study
All the initiatives implemented and those still to be trialled are appropriate for LSES students. No costs are incurred by students other than those involved in studying at CSU.
- To attempt to lower the number of students who attrite from the degree
By introducing strategies to assist students to settle into university study it is hoped that students will not find it so difficult in their transition from TAFE to university and will therefore be less likely to leave the course.
- To embed literacy and numeracy resources into subjects
All subject coordinators and writers are aware of this needing to be done and the first 4 subjects have been thoroughly reviewed and rewritten in the past year to ensure that this is taught and embedded into the subject outlines as well as within the content of the subjects.
- To review the learning experiences in subject outlines to ensure that the terminology is consistent and explicit
This has been looked at carefully in the first 4 subjects and coordinators have worked to ensure that the outlines are consistent and clear in what they say.
- To ensure that assessment items are in line with the university's First Year Curriculum Principles

This has been reviewed as well and coordinators have been working with the First Year Curriculum Principles in mind with the design of all assessment items.

- To provide explicit transitional support to students through the provision of information in regard to generic skills

This has been covered to a large extent by the designing of the Assessment Information Booklet that is included in all subjects. As well information relating to Student Central, the Library and the specific web site for the degree is also included in all subject Interact sites.

- To offer orientation to new students entering the degree

This is done in 2 ways. Either a face to face session at the beginning of each session in Sydney or an on-line version for students who cannot attend face to face.

- To target key groups and develop promotional material and support to people who may be interested in studying B.Ed (Birth – 5) at CSU

Visits have been made to a number of child care services to discuss options for studying at CSU. A flyer has been designed that gives information about the options open to students with the Children's Services or the B.Teach who want to upgrade to the B.Ed. (birth to five).

- To aid the transition of students from TAFE to university

A number of resources are put into each subject on the Interact site to assist students in their transition to university study. As well the subject coordinators in the first 4 subjects make specific information available to students to assist them to transition from TAFE to university (ie essay writing information, library searching, APA reference guides).

- To identify and assess as early as possible any students who may be 'at risk' of failure

Coordinators in the first 4 subjects keep a record of student engagement on the forum or chat rooms or reading the Subject Outline. They contact each student who has not shown any engagement via email to encourage them to take an active part in the subject. All students are reminded a week before the first assessment is due that they need to get the assessment in on time.

Coordinators encourage students to contact them with any queries and extensions on the first assessment item is offered quite willingly if the student has a good reason for needing one.

- To provide support for all students

There is the same support offered to all students whether they are LSES, At Risk or committed to study.

- Develop triggers and embed them into subjects for at risk students

This has been done and trialled with a low stakes assessment item and necessary engagement on forums to ascertain if students may be at risk of non engagement.

Overall the degree does have a high attrition rate but this is due to a number of reasons:

1. Students are mainly working full-time during the day
2. Most students are women with family commitments as well as study
3. Students have all gained a TAFE qualification but sometimes do not realise the work involved in university studies
4. Some students have been encouraged to enrol by their employers because of licensing requirements in the early childhood profession and are not really interested in studying themselves
5. Many of the students, because they are mature and because they are studying part-time will find they need a break during the study period and take a Leave of Absence for one or two sessions.
6. Some students who enrol in 2 subjects a session which is the normal enrolment pattern find that 2 subjects is too much work and so delete themselves from one subject and continue with just one.

So that although statistically the degree has high attrition rates it is usually for one of the above reasons and most students, once they successfully complete the first 2 subjects, will continue on and complete the degree even though it may take longer than recommended.

A number of factors were identified which impacted upon the likelihood of success of some of the initiatives trialled within the various courses.

For example, in the Birth to 5 course, the degree is offered entirely by distance with no face to face component required. All subjects are offered at least twice each year with many being offered in all three sessions. Staff employed to deliver subjects in this degree are not generally full-time academic members of the university. The university has a non teaching Director, 1 full-time teaching academic and all the remainder of the teaching is undertaken either by academics from within the faculty or by the employment of sessional staff. This results in a number of staff changes in all subjects every year. Many initiatives put in place by the university to assist students – such as the SST team and the PASS team were not appropriate to the cohort of students enrolled as they cannot be contacted during the day and are busy people who did not really want to be contacted at night. A trial was made to contact on Saturday by the SST team but it was found not to be successful either.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Individual recommendations

The following is a list of the recommendation emerging from the various parts of the STAR program in the Faculty of Education as documented in the sections above:

Recommendation 1. Future transition and retention programs should be evaluated in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Recommendation 2: Early, low stakes assessment tasks should be incorporated into all first year on campus subjects in a manner that allows students to ease into the academic context.

Recommendation 3: Strategies to increase attendance through communication, professional development and policy should be vigorously pursued.

Recommendation 4: Feedback strategies should be explicitly focused on providing students with learning about how to improve. ‘Feed forward’ strategies show substantial promise to this end but require additional marking time.

Recommendation 5: Orientation should focus on showing students what the reality of their university life will entail, rather than bombarding students with information which could be easily communicated on a ‘just in time’ basis.

Recommendation 6. Regular activities focussed on student orientation, transition or academic skill development should in general be integrated into subjects rather than scheduled on a course basis beyond the normal subject timetable.

Recommendation 7. Student engagement in academic skill support activities is likely to be greater if these activities are targeted at individual students based on their performance in assessment tasks and/or screening tests rather than delivered to all students in a cohort.

Recommendation 8: While STAR communications have had good reach, effort should be made to find out how to best target these messages.

Recommendation 9. Future programs aimed at improving first year students’ transition experiences should be accompanied by a rigorous system of accountability, engagement and support.

Recommendation 10. The session 1 and 2 on campus residential orientation program for the BIS course continue and this type of orientation be considered for other distance courses in the Faculty.

Recommendation 11. Meetings and study visits be scheduled in centres containing large numbers of distance students in a particular course to complement the main orientation programs.

Recommendation 12. Follow up work be undertaken to scrutinise the assessment in all first year undergraduate subjects to ensure alignment with first year curriculum principles.

Recommendation 13. The online academic and ICT skill development resources developed for BIS students be reviewed and refined in consultation with subject teams and links to these resources be integrated into subject materials as appropriate.

Recommendation 14. Consistent with the Faculty's online learning commitments, all first year distance subjects should include regular online synchronous sessions, and academic staff should be provided with support from educational designers and/or other staff to assist them in incorporating these sessions into their subjects.

Recommendation 15. In addition to university wide efforts to derive 'at risk' indicators there is value in course specific analysis to identify patterns of activity/engagement or subject completion/performance common to students who withdraw.

Recommendation 16. Follow ups with students 'at risk' are likely to be more effective if carried out by Subject Coordinators or Course Directors but caution is needed given the time commitment this might require.

Recommendation 17. Regardless of who has responsibility for follow up with students 'at risk' better mechanisms are needed to provide timely information to Subject Coordinators and Course Directors about the engagement status and performance of students in the subjects and courses they are responsible for.

Recommendation 18. Studylink subjects be advertised to incoming students as soon as possible after acceptance of their offer, to allow their completion before the commencement of the course.

Recommendation 19. Students, who exhibit a particular difficulty with academic skills, as exhibited in subject-based assessment and activities, should be advised to undertake relevant Studylink subjects ideally during the optional session 3 period.

Recommendation 20. Evaluation of student perceptions of Studylink subjects and analysis of the performance of students who complete them is needed to provide a stronger empirical base for judgements about their value for students in specific courses.

Recommendation 21. Sydney orientation sessions continue to be offered in Session 1 and 2 for commencing BEd(B-5) students and these types of sessions held in centres containing large numbers of students in a course be considered for other distance courses without an on campus orientation program.

Recommendation 22. That online orientation sessions be provided in all distance courses without a compulsory on campus orientation program, ideally as synchronous sessions recorded for students unable to attend.

Recommendation 23. Further trials of early low stakes assessment be undertaken in distance subjects but with caution to ensure that unintended consequences relating to student withdrawal or inability to withdraw do not occur.

Recommendation 24. An Interact site be developed for the B-5 course including information and academic support resources developed specifically for this course as well as links to more generic resources provided by other parts of the university.

Recommendation 25. Wherever possible continuing or contract academic staff members are allocated to convene or coordinate subjects in the first year of courses to ensure awareness of and cooperation with Faculty and course initiatives to support first year students.

Recommendation 26. Synchronous sessions introduced within subjects should be optional rather than compulsory and should be recorded or captured for later viewing/reading by students unable to attend.

Recommendation 27. All new continuing, contract and sessional staff allocated to teach first year subjects be provided with professional development to ensure that they are aware of the needs of first year students and the transition and retention approaches being implemented in the Faculty, School or course.

Recommendation 28. The online booklet to support B-5 students in completion of assessment tasks should be further refined and links to the booklet should be integrated into all subjects in the degree.

Recommendation 29. Support be provided to subject coordinators in first year distance subjects to produce a welcome video either as a standalone resources or as a recorded synchronous session.

7.2 Conclusions and key recommendations for the future

In evaluating the impact of the STAR program within the Faculty of Education overall, audited data sources focussing on student retention, rates of progress and student experience provide an inconclusive picture. The inconclusiveness of the data partly reflects the lagged nature of audited data on student retention/attrition and progress. Nevertheless the lack of conclusive evidence that the initiatives put in place during the STAR program have had a positive impact is somewhat disappointing given the size, scope and cost of the program.

It is clear from evaluations of the initiatives undertaken that there is still a great deal that could be done to improve student transition experiences and consequently improve retention and progress. The area of the STAR program in the Faculty of Education where perhaps the least change has occurred thus far is that of curriculum and assessment within subjects. Evidence from evaluation of the STAR program within the Faculty suggests that student engagement is greater when support initiatives occur within subjects rather than outside of subjects. Given this, there is a question mark about whether the employment of a team of people at the faculty level to further student transition and retention needs is the best use of resources, or

whether better resourcing of course leadership teams may be a more effective strategy. This leads to the first key recommendation:

Key Recommendation 1. Any future transition and retention initiatives within the Faculty should have a much closer involvement of Course Directors to ensure a greater focus on changes within course and subject designs rather than on the provision of support activities outside of subjects.

One of the challenges in implementing cohesive changes to subjects within a course to address transition and retention needs is the absence of an agreed set of principles which could underpin this work. Although a set of 'First Year Curriculum Principles' has been proposed (see Kift, 2009), work is needed within the faculty to scrutinise and refine these principles, in light of the findings from the STAR initiative, in order to arrive at a set of more specific principles that are agreed to by all Faculty, School and course leaders. This leads to the second key recommendation:

Key Recommendation 2. Drawing on the findings of STAR, best practice within the sector and wider scholarship, the Faculty should agree on a set of first year curriculum principles to underpin the design of subjects within the first year of all courses.

Barriers emerged in some courses to making changes within subjects, including perceived ownership of subjects by individuals or resistance to changes proposed by an 'outsider'. Additionally, although substantial progress was made within some courses in this area, some of this work has been superseded by course reviews resulting in the removal of the subjects that were the focus of STAR. Systematic scrutiny of subjects for adherence to first year curriculum principles would be a valuable initiative. Such an initiative would need to be overseen by Course Directors to ensure that identified issues are actually addressed. This leads to the third key recommendation:

Key Recommendation 3. The Faculty should resource course leadership teams to oversee the scrutiny and refinement of subjects in their courses to implement agreed first year curriculum principles.

The lack of engagement by some staff in the work of the STAR program illustrates the need for Heads of School to be more closely involved in initiatives like STAR so that they can use their influence to maximise staff engagement. In addition to this, the formal adoption of policies within the faculty that articulate agreed first year curriculum principles will help provide clarity to leaders and staff about the Faculty's priorities in this area and will also be helpful in ensuring consistent messages. The Faculty of Business' Enhancing the Student Experience policy may be a good model for this kind of document. Such a document could set out specific expectations on subject design and teaching staff aligned to agreed Faculty transition and retention principles.

Key Recommendation 4. The faculty should develop a policy document that sets out expectations on teaching academic staff to ensure that agreed first year curriculum principles are followed in the teaching of all first year subjects.

8 Acknowledgements

The STAR team in the Faculty of Education wish to acknowledge the work of many individuals who have assisted greatly over the course of the plan. They include:

- Ged Bourke
- Eric Drinkwater
- Jae Major
- Jackey Osborne
- Jo Reid
- Denise Wood
- Sessional lecturers in Exercise Science and Primary Education (whose commitment to STAR went above and beyond their workload in many cases)

9 References

Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education: Final report for ALTC senior fellowship program*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Appendix A. Early Low Stakes Assessment Task

EHR101

TUTORIAL ACTIVITIES TO BE ASSESSED AS PART OF ASSESSMENT TASK
1

WEEK 2

Pass/Fail 2%

Assessment Criteria:

- Completion of all questions

Post onto EHR101 Forum by 11.59pm, March 9th, 2012

Task: Complete the 'introduce yourself' question sheet

WEEK 3

Pass/Fail 2%

Assessment Criteria:

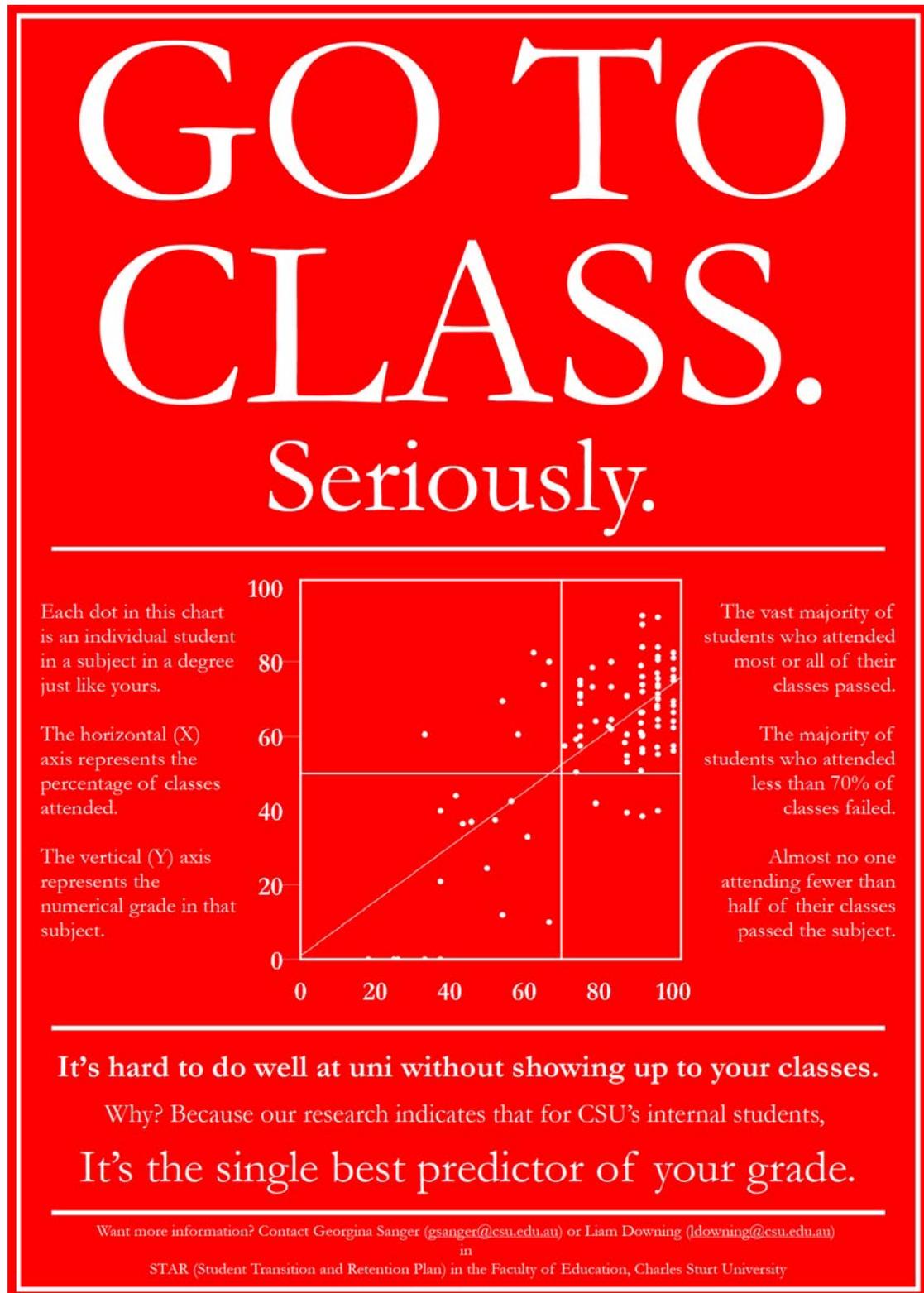
- 250 word response/s written in complete sentences, grammatically correct and with adequate attention to spelling with less than 3 spelling or grammatical errors throughout.
- Name and explain at least 3 elements of your philosophy of sport and/or exercise

Hand deliver to the tutor at the completion of your designated tutorial time in Week 3

Task: Write your personal philosophy of sport.

Appendix B. GO TO CLASS. Seriously. Poster

(embedded PDF, double click to open)



Appendix C. Feedforward task example

(EML110, 201330)

Task

Inquiring into everyday literacy practices - Group Presentation and Individual Report

You are to conduct a collaborative inquiry about an ‘everyday’ literacy event. A literacy event is any social event involving texts (print, digital, oral, visual) which can be meaningfully interpreted or constructed. For example, family literacy events might include: bedtime stories, reading cereal boxes, viewing television programs and discussing them, writing notes and lists, letter writing, taking and labelling photographs to email to relatives, etc.

In a group of 3-4 you will observe and collect data about a literacy event and the practices (activities) it involves, analyse its features and characteristics, make links to subject materials and theories about language and literacy, and present your findings to the rest of your tutorial group (worth 15%). You will also write an individual report of 1,000 words (25%).

The collaborative inquiry should be planned, conducted and written up over several weeks. During this time, you should arrange to meet as a group at least once a week; you could also make use of CSU Interact for your communications.

Research Ethics

Because literacy practices involve people, you need to be aware of the ethical implications of your investigation. This includes gaining informed consent from the people that you observe, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity by not identifying people by their real names. Please read the information about ethics at the end of the assignment description.

Inquiry Process

This assignment is designed as an inquiry to support you through the process of conducting a simple piece of research. There are five stages as you work your way through this task; they are outlined below. Read and follow the process carefully to ensure you complete all parts.

1 Identifying

At this stage you identify the people you are going to work with, the topic to focus on, and the key questions that will guide your inquiry. There will be input in lectures and tutorials to help you understand what a literacy event is, and what literacy practices are.

- Form a collaborative group with 2-3 other people that you are going to work with.
- Together identify a literacy practice that you are interested in investigating.

- There are some key questions that everyone must consider and answer as part of the inquiry (see below), but you also need to construct 2-3 questions specific to your particular topic and literacy event.

Key Questions:

- 1 What are literacy events and practices?
- 2 How are they social?
- 3 What are their features and characteristics?
- 4 How can everyday literacy events contribute to literacy at school?

2 Locating information

This stage of inquiry requires you to gather data or information to answer the questions you have constructed. Because the focus of this inquiry is literacy practices, the main way that you will gather data is through observing people engaged in your chosen literacy event.

- Identify a context or place in which your chosen literacy event occurs. Describe this context clearly – you could take photos of the context (keeping ethical considerations in mind), and write a 300 - 500 word description.
- Arrange to observe the literacy event in action on at least one occasion (but maybe more than once would be better).
- Make detailed notes to record what you observe. Things to record include: time and place, who is involved, the sequence of events, what each person did (their practices), the kinds of texts that were involved – oral, visual, written etc, how the texts were used and for what purpose.
- Discuss the literacy event and its practices with participants to clarify events and why certain things happened. Record what participants said about the literacy event and practices – how they talked about it, what it meant to them and how they understood it.

3 Processing the information

At this stage you need to consider the data you have gathered and think about what it means and how it answers your questions. You need to make links to subject readings and concepts and theories about literacy practices. You will be provided with some tools in tutorials to assist with this process.

- In your group, discuss your observation notes and revisit the inquiry questions. Consider how you will answer the questions and ensure you have all the information you need to do this thoroughly.
- Complete tutorial activities to help you make sense of the data.
- Use subject materials to make links to concepts and theories about literacy practices.
- Use evidence from your observations to support your answers.

4 Communicating and presenting

At this stage you decide how you are going to present your findings to the rest of your tutorial group. In addition you must also present your findings as an individual 1,000 word report.

- Design a 5-10 minute presentation supported by a short Power Point presentation to communicate your findings (15% of the final mark). Ensure that everyone in the

group has a role to play in the presentation. Information in your presentation should include:

1. Details about the literacy practice – what, where, who etc
2. What roles the participants took
3. What kinds of texts were involved, how they were used and for what purpose

• Write an individual 1,000 word report of the findings of your inquiry. This should include the same information as the group presentation in report format as well as considering:

1. What you now understand about literacy as a social practice
2. How you think this would contribute to literacy learning for children at school

Part 1- The group submission will be presented and marked in class. Students will share responsibility for the preparation and presentation of the research.

Part 2 - The individual report will be submitted on April 26 (see subject overview).

Students are expected to:

1. Write up the findings from their observation of an everyday literacy event in a 1,000 word report (explored from your own perspective).
2. Make explicit connections between observations (what you saw), personal insights (what you think and have learnt in the subject content) and the literature (what theorists have said about language and literacy from what you have read in the book of readings, and the textbook).
3. Present a well structured report which includes an introduction paragraph, clearly defined paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph.
4. Use word processing software effectively, and include a digital image, heading and paragraph styles, headers and footers, bullet points, and a generated table of contents.

NOTE: It is expected that both parts of the assignment will meet these criteria:

- Provides clear contextual information of the literacy event, identifies and describes social purposes and activities.
- Discusses how texts (written, digital, oral & visual) are used and understood in the context by all participants. Discusses interactants' roles (as insiders and outsiders) in relation to the social purpose (what is happening, why, who is involved, how people are interacting).
- Demonstrates an understanding of the theories presented in the literature about social practices in different language and literacy contexts.
- Examples are provided to substantiate each point.

Appendix D. O Week activity outline

Good morning everyone,

Welcome. I am Georgina Sanger and I work in the STAR plan. I won't bore with details about that but you need to know us (Liam is over there – he prepared that meme presentation) because sometimes you will read an announcement on interact from me, and occasionally Liam will come to class to ask you to participate in our research on the first year experience. We want you to be happy and successful first year students.

Let's get into it...

First, stand up if you worked hard to be here; now, put your hands up if you still can't believe that you are here...

Look around... you are similar, and I bet that you are feeling the same.

Congratulations – Step One – Tick!

Some of you went to the Commencement ceremony on Monday. I did too.

3 things stood out for me

1. the harder you work, the luckier you will be
2. Go hard
3. 'strategic mischief'

I want to ask you to think about what they mean. Any ideas??

I think that they are about choices, and more importantly, expectations. I'm not talking about the choices that others might make for you, or the expectations that we and others might have of you. I want you think about the choices that you are going to make and the expectations that you have of yourself.

You have made it here – where will you go next?

Introduce yourself to the person next to you. Tell them these 3 things – 1. your name, 2. why you are here and 3. what you want to be doing professionally in 10 years time.

Have a couple of minutes.

Did you learn something about the person? Did they sound determined, organised, anxious? Did you?

Each of you should have a name sticker. There is a number on the bottom. When I ask you to, I want you to find the other people with the same number. Then you will find a place to sit. When you are all together, elect a scribe, a speaker and someone who will make sure that everyone has a turn to contribute to the group discussion.

Explain activity – I want you to discuss what you think it will be like to be a uni student. Think of positive things and negative things.

Ok – off you go. Helpers wander around.

I will go around to help and to give the lift the flap activity – How will we get to the places we want to be in 10 years? Think choices and expectations.

Ask everyone to come back in.

Each speaker to summarise the Uni student and to say how they will get...

Now, why did I ask you to do that?

So, you talk to each other, you start to learn how to work in a group, and so that you have an opportunity to explore the ‘student role’ – what it’s like at uni.

Most importantly, I wanted to challenge you to think about the type of student that you are going to be.

I want to emphasise something about what we think a uni student should sound like.... a uni student should sound inquisitive – they ask questions when they aren’t sure, and they seek answers from a range of people and services available to them. As Liam said, if you can’t find it – google it!

Let’s ask Dr Seuss for some encouragement as you start your journey today...

Let me finish by challenging you to think about the type of student that you want to be, and the choices that you will make that will take you to the places that you want to go.

Have a great year.

Appendix E. Example of student communications

STAR Announcement 25th July, Week 2 Session 201360

Hello everyone,

I hope that you have settled in quickly to your routine for this semester.

Have you prepared your weekly schedule, and completed the assessment due date map? These will help you to be organised.

Have you been or are you going to PASS this week? If not, why not? Check here for times:

<http://student.csu.edu.au/study/pass/timetables>

Please see the attached flyer from Academic Support about the services that they offer including study skills, workshops, online forums, and one on one assignment support.

And, attached also is a VERY useful resource called the CSU Guide to Writing your First Assignment. It has some great strategies to help you to understand the task and the question, as well as tips for getting started and what to do when you get your assignment back.

You should be aware of our very strong focus on ATTENDANCE this semester. Note also that, as per our communications last semester, if you attend fewer than 70% of your scheduled classes you are less likely to achieve a passing grade.

Remember – you need to EARN your degree!

Have a great day,
Georgina

Attendance announcement

Just as a follow-on from something we talked about in O Week, we thought we'd provide you with some real life data on what kind of impact class attendance could have on how you go at university.

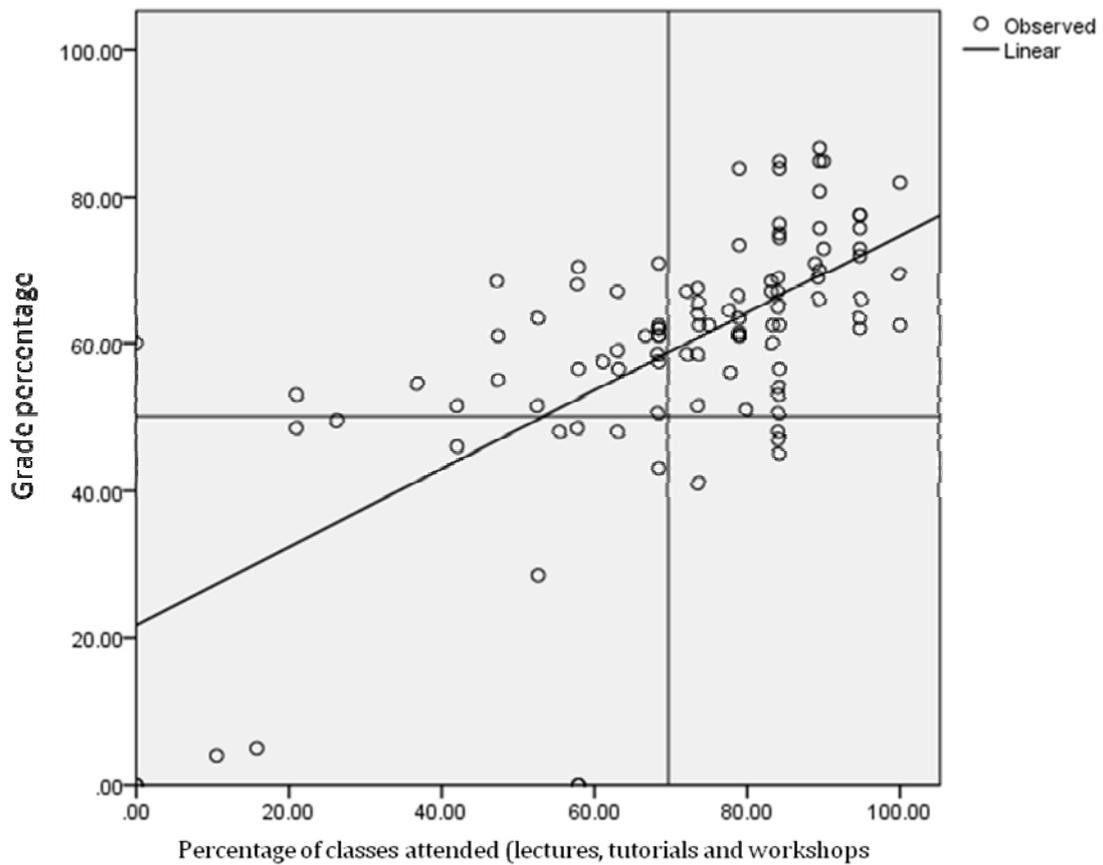
So firstly, we spoke at O Week about a 'level playing field' when you first arrive at uni, in that it doesn't really matter what your ATAR was, or how you got it. Instead, what matters most is what you do when you arrive. One of the things we mentioned was the fact that those who attended class regularly were likely to pass, while those who missed more than a few lectures were likely to fail.

You may remember we used this slide to illustrate this during our presentation in O Week:



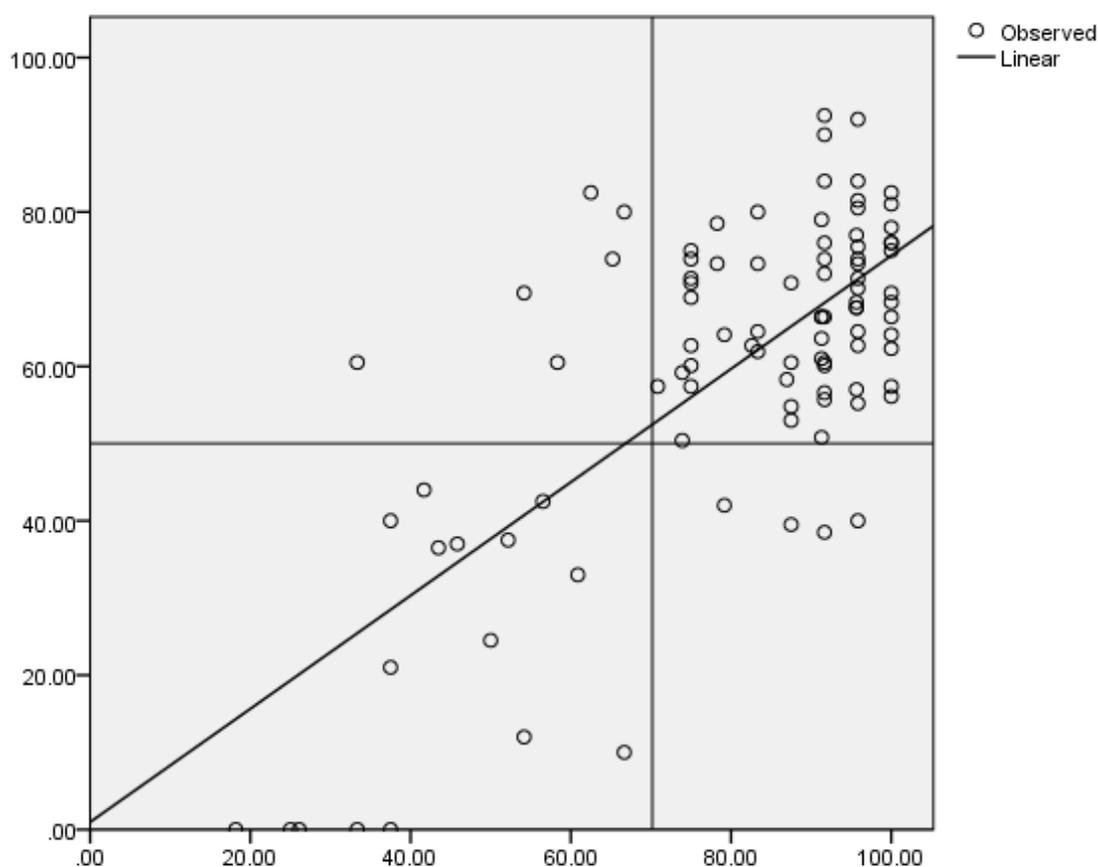
We also mentioned having some real life data and charts which were too boring for O Week. Given you've probably been checking out some interesting writing and research, we thought now might be a good time to let you know about our real findings.

So this first chart here is from a subject in a degree like yours (or possibly even yours!). The X Axis (the horizontal one at the bottom) represents the number of classes (including lectures, tutorials and workshops) attended. The Y Axis (the vertical one on the left) represents numerical grade in that subject. The horizontal line in the middle of the chart is at 50% grade, which is the typical cutoff between pass and fail. You need to end up above that line! The vertical line is at 70% attendance. The little circles are individual students.



Now, using some fancy statistical gymnastics, the diagonal line gives you some indication of where you'll end up based on the number of classes you attend. Obviously, there are other factors involved, but our numbers showed that in this subject, only a small fraction of those who attended more than 70% of classes failed, while a much larger fraction who attended less than 70% failed.

Below is a chart from another of our subjects:



Check out that top right hand corner! Heaps of students who passed (and better!) and attended most of their classes. Only one student who attended less than half of their classes passed (and likely did so because of talking with their lecturer about possible alternatives, and a fair bit of hard work to make it up).

Clearly, it's pretty hard to do well without attending classes. And people who have done the research at other unis agree. Some even came up with good a rule of thumb, which says that if you don't attend at least 70% of your classes, you've got a 2 in 3 chance of failing. If you attend less than 80%, it's about 50/50 (Newman-Ford, Fitzgibbon, Lloyd & Thomas, 2008, p. 702).

So there's the data! This is why we've been talking about it so much, and why your lecturers emphasise how important it is, a lot. While there's heaps of other factors which come into play in your success at uni, class attendance is easily the biggest factor, and it's one you can be in complete control of.

Long story short: turn up to class, because it'll be easier to do well if you do!

Reference:

Newman-Ford, L., K. Fitzgibbon, et al. (2008). "A Large-Scale Investigation into the Relationship between Attendance and Attainment: A Study Using an Innovative, Electronic Attendance Monitoring System." *Studies in Higher Education* **33**(6): 699-717.

Appendix F. Benchmark and Evaluation questionnaire

STAR Plan benchmarking and evaluation

STUDENT SURVEY/QUESTIONNAIRE

About you...

1. Approximately how many hours drive is your home town away from the CSU campus where you are studying? Home town means where you have most recently moved from to study at CSU. (Please circle your answer)
 - 1 0 hours (you are currently studying in your home town)
 - 2 Less than 30 minutes
 - 3 31-60 minutes
 - 4 1-2 hours
 - 5 2-3 hours
 - 6 3-5 hours
 - 7 More than 5 hours

2. Which of the following best describes your current living arrangements? (Please circle the number next to your answer) I live...
 - 1 At home with my parents.
 - 2 On campus in Charles Sturt University student accommodation.
 - 3 Off campus in Charles Sturt University student accommodation.
 - 4 Off campus in private (e.g. rented, mortgaged or privately owned) accommodation with housemates who are fellow CSU students
 - 5 Off campus in private (e.g. rented, mortgaged or privately owned) accommodation with housemates who are not students
 - 6 Off campus in private (e.g. rented, mortgaged or privately owned) accommodation, living alone
 - 7 In a different circumstance – please describe

3. On average, approximately how many hours of paid work do you do per week during session? (Paid work means work for which you earn a wage or salary. Please write your answer in the space below.)

4. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is very difficult and 10 is very easy, how easy has it been to stay in touch with your immediate family since commencing study? (Please circle your answer. If you are unsure or cannot remember, circle unsure. If this is not applicable to you, please circle NA)

(If you answered 5 or lower) Why has it not been easy to stay in touch with your immediate family?

5. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is very difficult and 10 is very easy, how easy has it been to stay in touch with your close friends since commencing study? (Please circle your answer. If you are unsure or cannot remember, circle unsure. If this is not applicable to you, please circle NA)

(If you answered 5 or lower) Why has it not been easy to stay in touch with your close friends?

Preparedness for university...

6. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all prepared and 10 is very well prepared, how prepared for tertiary study would you say you were upon entrance into university? (Please circle your answer. If you are unsure or cannot remember, circle unsure)
7. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is poor and 10 is excellent, how would you rank your academic ability upon entrance into university? (Please circle your answer. If you are unsure or cannot remember, circle unsure)
8. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is poor and 10 is excellent, how would you rank your academic ability right now? (Please circle your answer. If you are unsure or cannot remember, circle unsure)

How you feel about university right now...

9. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree, please rate your agreement with the following statements. (Please tick the box corresponding to your answer. If you are unsure, tick the unsure box)

a) I feel I belong at CSU
b) I feel I belong in my course
c) I feel I was well supported in my first semester within this course
d) I feel like I am participating fully in the academic side of university life
e) I feel like I am participating fully in the social side of university life
f) I have thought about leaving university
g) I am currently thinking about leaving university
h) I feel that the subjects I have studied so far have provided a good introduction to academic life
i) I feel that the subjects I have studied so far have met my individual needs
j) I feel that the subjects I have studied so far are focused on me
k) I am interested in the subjects I am studying
l) I feel that my assessment tasks are challenging
m) I feel that my assessment tasks allow me to show my knowledge learned in the subjects I have studied
n) I feel that my assessment tasks have been too difficult
o) I can see the relevance of my assessment tasks to my future work

Some further questions... (all open ended)

10. If you have seriously thought about leaving, what are the things that you found most challenging or influential in making you think about withdrawing from the course?
11. If you have thought seriously about leaving university, what were the things that have helped you in staying on / persevering?
12. Is there anything else you think that has been supportive of your transition to university, and your course of study?
13. Do you have any suggestions for improving the transition of first year students in your course at CSU?

Thank you for your time in completing this survey/questionnaire.

Appendix G. 'Check in' questionnaire

Reflection

At this stage in the semester it is often quite normal to feel anxious or unsure or even disappointed about your choice of course or your expectations of university life. If you are not feeling this way: congratulations! You may have made the transition to university life a little better than others.

Spend the next few minutes thinking about your choices and experience so far...

1. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree, please rate your agreement with the following statements. (Please circle the answer corresponding to your answer. If you are unsure, tick the unsure box)

University is better than I expected

I have chosen the right course

I think I am succeeding in my studies

I would like more support in my studies

2. I have found the following resources useful (tick all that apply):

Lectures

Tutorials

Lecturers

PASS

The Library (Learning Commons)

Interact

Learning Skills Advisers

Counselling Service

Health Service

Disability service

Equity support

Academic advice

Spiritual support

Student Support Officers

Sport and Fitness

Clubs and Societies

Financial Aid

Dental Service

Talking to Learn/Study of Teaching

Other (please specify below):

I think I can improve my experience of university by... (please write your answer below)

Appendix H. Group discussion guide

Intro [10 minutes – ends :10]

- Thanks for agreeing to come along today
- Logistics
 - Food – eat!
 - Turn mobile phones off
- Audio recording
 - We will be recording the audio from today’s conversation
 - Recordings will be transcribed, and audio deleted once this happens
 - Everything you say in here will be treated in the strictest confidence
 - All identifying information will be removed from transcripts
 - We are not teaching staff
 - Clarify consent and hit record
- Rules – not many, but main ones are
 - all opinions are valid, none are wrong,
 - Please let everyone have their say
 - One person at a time speaks
- Any questions?

General discussion [15 minutes – ends :25]

- OK, we’re going to start with a written activity [HAND OUT NOTEPAD ACTIVITY 1 – QUESTIONS ARE]
 - What have been the two most positive things about starting at university?
 - What have been the two most negative things about starting at university?
 - What would you change if you were in charge of CSU?
- [GO AROUND GROUP, ASKING EACH PARTICIPANT TO READ OUT ‘POSITIVE’ ANSWERS]
 - OK, is there anything there that keeps on cropping up? Why do you think that is?
 - Why are these things positive? Do you think we could do more of it? How?

- [GO AROUND GROUP, ASKING EACH PARTICIPANT TO READ OUT ‘NEGATIVE’ ANSWERS]
 - OK, is there anything there that keeps on cropping up? Why do you think that is?
 - Do you have any thoughts on how we could address that or deal with it? How about your lecturers? How about you as students?
- [GO AROUND GROUP, ASKING EACH PARTICIPANT TO READ OUT ANSWERS ON WHAT THEY WOULD DO IF THEY WERE IN CHARGE – TRY AND TEASE OUT ANSWERS THAT WOULD LIKELY IMPROVE RETENTION AND SUCCESS (I.E. ACADEMIC FOCUS)]
 - OK, is there anything there that keeps on cropping up? Why do you think that is?
- Is university what you expected?
 - Why/why not?

Attendance (including poster) [10 minutes– ends :35]

- How important do you think attending class is?
 - [ALL]
 - How much do you attend class? Would you say it’s more or less than 70%? [HEADCOUNT]
 - How important do your friends think it is? Why do your friends think that?
 - [ASK IF NOT IMPORTANT]
 - Why not? [PROBE FOR SPECIFIC RATIONALE, INCLUDING LECTURES V TUTORIALS/WORKSHOPS, LECTURE NOTES/CSU REPLAY AVAILABILITY, AUTHENTICITY ETC]
 - Is there anything which might convince you that attendance is important? [PROBE FOR INTERNAL/IN CLASS STUFF V EXTERNAL STUFF]
 - [IF IMPORTANT]
 - Why is it important? [PROBE FOR SPECIFIC REASONS – WHAT THEY GET OUT OF CLASS THAT THEY WOULD OTHERWISE NOT]
- [HOLD UP A3 POSTER – HAND OUT A4 COPIES]
 - Have you seen this poster anywhere?
 - [IF YES] Where have you seen it?
 - I’ll just give you a minute or two to read it.
 - What do you think it’s saying?
 - Do you understand what it’s saying?

- Would you stop and read this poster if you saw it up on a wall at uni?
 - Where do you think would be the best place to put it?
 - Where would you be most likely to see it?
 - Where do you spend the most time at uni?

Feedforward [7 minutes– ends :42]

- Have you had any assessments come back to you this session with feedback?
 - Which pieces of assessment?
 - How useful was the feedback on these? How was it useful/not useful?
 - Was any of the feedback different in any of your subjects? How?
 - [IF NEEDED] Did you receive any feedback which fed into your next piece of assessment in any of your subjects?
 - How useful was this? Why is that?

O-week [8 minutes– ends :50]

- I'd now like you to cast your mind back to O-week. Tell me a bit about your experiences.
 - Which experiences were most memorable? [PROBE - TARGET ACADEMICALLY-RELATED EXPERIENCES]
 - Why is that?
 - What was memorable about these experiences? Why is that?
 - Which presentations do you think worked best? Why is that?
 - Do you think there was too much, too little or just the right amount of information about your course? Why is that?
 - Do you think there was too much, too little or just the right amount of information about academic support? Why is that?
 - Do you think there was too much, too little or just the right amount of information about other stuff than your course or academic support? Why is that?

Interact [5 minutes– ends :55]

- How do you use Interact?
 - [PROBE – TARGET STAR INTERACT ANNOUNCEMENTS]
 - What do you find most useful about Interact? Why?
 - What do you find least useful? Why?

[PRIMARY ED ONLY] [5 minutes– ends :60]

- Have you heard anything about the future NSW or federal governments' literacy requirements for graduating teachers or those about to go on their final placement?
 - What have you heard? [PROBE]
 - Where did you hear this?
 - Have you heard anything about it from your lecturers?
 - [IF NO ONE HAS HEARD OF IT, OR IF CLARIFICATION IS REQUIRED] The main things we will talk about now will relate to the requirement that 'teacher education students will need to pass a literacy and numeracy assessment before their final-year professional experience placement.' The assessment will be designed to allow the NSW Department of Education and Communities to ensure that graduating students are in the top 30% of literacy and numeracy in the population.
 - How does that make you feel?
 - Are you concerned about this? Why is that/why not?
 - Is there anything you think might help you in passing this assessment?

Appendix I. STAR Initiatives Evaluation Survey

(embedded PDF, double click to open)



STAR evaluation: Student Questionnaire

This form is processed through machines. Please completely fill in the bubble that corresponds with your answer or write your answer in the relevant box. Please DO NOT write your answer outside the box, as it will not be recorded.

: Not filled

: Filled

: Wrong methods of marking Answers

Please fill out the form to the best of your knowledge, and please be honest. Feedback gathered in this survey is completely anonymous.

Attendance

(1) Have you seen, read or heard any communication about attendance this semester?

Yes

No (go to question 4)

(2) Which of the following have you seen or heard? (Select all that apply)

Red attendance poster (Go to class. Seriously.)

Attendance policy in subject outline/s

Announcements through Interact

Other (Please specify in Question 3 (below))

(3) Please specify which other communications you have seen about attendance this session. Please write your answer in the box below.

(4) Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 0-10, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree.

		0 - Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - Strongly agree	Unsure/ don't know
1	The attendance policy shows that the university cares about whether I am in the classroom or not.	<input type="checkbox"/>											
2	The attendance policy is fair.	<input type="checkbox"/>											
3	The attendance policy encourages me to show up to class.	<input type="checkbox"/>											
4	The 50% attendance requirement is too low.	<input type="checkbox"/>											

(5) If you have any additional thoughts on attendance, please write them in the box below.

Appendix J. Staff Evaluation Survey

Student Transition And Retention – Evaluation

Survey of First Year Staff and Course Directors

Bachelor of Exercise Science and Bachelor of Education (Primary)

1. [ASK ALL] Can you describe briefly the purpose of the STAR plan? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
2. [ASK ALL] Have you made changes to your learning and teaching practices as a result of your participation in the STAR plan? [YES] [NO]
 - a. [IF YES TO Q2] Can you describe the change, if possible? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - b. [IF YES TO Q2] Can you describe the outcome, if possible? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - c. [IF NO TO Q2] Can you explain why you didn't make changes? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - d. [ASK ALL] Please describe any specific barriers to greater participation/support of the plan. *Please type your answer in the box below.*
3. [ASK ALL] Do you think that you have a better understanding of the types of students that are enrolling at CSU now? [YES] [NO]
 - a. [IF YES TO Q3] Why is that? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - b. [IF NO TO Q3] Why not? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - c. [ASK ALL] What would help in furthering your understanding of the types of students that are enrolling at CSU now? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
4. Can you list some qualities of these 'non traditional' students? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
5. In 2012, priorities have been feedback, thinking about learning, assessment design and attendance. Have you incorporated any of these initiatives into your teaching and learning practices? *Please select all that apply, or select 'None of the above' if none apply.*

- a. Feedback
 - b. Thinking about learning
 - c. Assessment design
 - d. Attendance
 - e. None of the above
- b. [IF Q5=a, b, c or d] Please reflect on whether these initiatives have impacted positively or otherwise on learning outcomes for students. *Please type your answer in the box below.*
- c. [IF Q5=e] Please reflect on why you did not incorporate any of these initiatives into your teaching and learning practices. *Please type your answer in the box below.*
6. Have you implemented any other initiatives to support the First Year Curriculum Principles? [YES] [NO]
- a. [IF YES TO Q6] Please describe the initiatives. *Please type your answer in the box below.*
 - b. [IF YES TO Q6] Please describe the outcomes. *Please type your answer in the box below.*
7. What would you like to include as priorities for STAR in 2013? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
8. What do you see as the role of the STAR team? *Please type your answer in the box below.*
9. Are there ways that the STAR team can support you better in 2013? Please be specific. *Please type your answer in the box below.*

Appendix K. Coffee with a STAR

Jae Major

We caught up with Jae Major for a coffee to find out more about her experiences in the STAR program over the past 18 months.

Jae, can you tell us more about the STAR program and why CSU has implemented this program?

The STAR plan is an initiative to support students as they transition to University. The reasons for the plan include making sure that students have a positive experience in their first year of study, helping them to be successful, to decrease the rate of attrition and also because there is an understanding that a large number of CSU students are low SES, first in family to study at University, have limited cultural capital and require additional support.

Over the last 18 months, I have seen STAR developing, and there has been encouragement and support to design learning that supports students more explicitly as they learn new concepts, skills and practices.

STAR is not just about students; it is also about improving teaching practices. Hopefully it will go across year groups so that learning support is scaffolded effectively.

What has been the change in your understanding of the students you are involved with?

The main change is the way I view first year students now. In Primary Education the cohort is extremely diverse – far more diverse than I have previously experienced; students have a broader range of skills, and you can't make assumptions about what they know and can do.

Knowing this, I have had to change the way I teach.

Have you made any changes to learning and teaching practices as a result of the STAR Program? What has been the result of these changes?

I have made quite a few changes:

1. I think more carefully now about core concepts and the skills that are needed. I have taken out content to include fewer, central concepts. I am focussed now on depth rather than breadth.
2. Directly relating to STAR – I am trying to create better connections between subjects so that students can see the connections.
3. I now incorporate a wider range of teaching and learning strategies in my lectures and tutorials. I focus explicitly on teaching and building the skills that are needed for assessments.
4. I have implemented the Feedback/Feedforward initiative. Markers reported an improved quality of work after students receive feedback. Markers like the feedforward sheet.

The results – “I feel more satisfied with my teaching”.

SEQ – Students have reported a high level of satisfaction and a positive experience in the literacy subject. This includes students who had been very worried about the subject – “I have learnt a lot”.

What are some of the challenges associated with participating fully in programs such as the STAR program?

The key challenge is time – time to meet with each other and to meet with STAR staff and time to prepare material.

Another challenge is always leadership of the program – the leaders in the Faculty of Education have contributed positively to the success of the program.

A further challenge is that you have to assess your learning pathway and check the progress of your students. You need to be reflective and prepared to make changes along the way based on student understanding.

Another challenge is that marking takes longer.

There is also the challenge of sustainability – will lecturers continue to make changes? One suggestion is that there is some negotiation with Heads of Schools to appoint leaders at each year level to coordinate and continue meetings (for example a First Year Team Leader).

What lessons have we learned from these programs that we can apply across subsequent year levels?

We need to roll out the ideas and strategies that we have been using with first year students throughout all years.

There needs to be a pedagogy and assessment plan that sets in place (documents) a commitment to scaffolding support throughout a degree. In that plan there might be examples of types of assessments for each year level, the types of support required at each year level, and this should show that the balance of support changes over time from a high level of support in first year that decreases in subsequent years as students progress.

Eric Drinkwater

Eric, how has your engagement with the STAR plan changed your ideas about the students that you teach at CSU?

I've gained an appreciation for the impact that being first-in-family to attend university can have on a student. I had never considered the impact of nobody else in a student's family ever having been to university. I used to make a lot of assumptions about the "cultural capital" students came to CSU with. Both my parents were professors, so I was well supported for university long before I ever started. I'm recognising now that I cannot use my own university experiences to make assumptions about the students I teach.

How has this knowledge about your students impacted your approach to learning and teaching?

I scaffold tasks much better now (or at least I'm trying to). When I write an assessment task I think about the knowledge that they will need complete that task; not just subject-related knowledge but things like computer skills and using software. I don't rely on students to be motivated to "figure it out"; I know I need to (for example) post a screen capture video on how to do a calculation in Excel.

Have you implemented any specific strategies to support your students and to increase engagement? What impact have these had?

Yes, like I mentioned before, I'm doing a lot more video. I'm using Quicktime screen captures of my desktop computer, video demonstrations of tutorial skills, and CSU Replay. It allows students to stop the demonstration part way through to give something a try and then rewind the video to watch again if they need to.

What changes have you made to your assessment practices? Have the changes impacted student performance in your subjects?

I'm being much clearer with how a task is going to be assessed in the description of each assessment item. I used to think that if I was too explicit "I might as well write the assignment for them", but I've learned that there is a difference between setting clear guidelines and simply being overly prescriptive.

I'm having students engage with feedback by having them reply to my feedback from previous assignments in their future assignments (i.e. feedforward). Do they know that feedback on their assessment tasks is given so they can implement in their future work, or do we write comments assuming students will know what to do with them?

Appendix L. Birth to 5 Orientation Session Questionnaire

Charles Sturt University
Faculty of Education.
Distance Student Orientation Session 2012

Thank you for attending our Distance Learning Orientation in 2012. This is the first time we have provided this activity and we are interested in your feedback to help future development of this. Please fill in your responses over the session and return it at the end of your session.
Thank you.

Course: B Education (0-5) B Teach (Primary) B Teach
(Secondary)

1. Were you provided with appropriate information by the University prior to the Orientation Session?

Comment

.....

2. How useful was the Orientation Session? 1 2 3 4 5 (highly)

Comment

.....

3. Comment on 2 aspects at the Orientation Session you found helpful or particularly good.

a.

.....

b.

.....



Thank you.

Appendix M. Evaluation Results for of B-5 Student Orientation Session 2013

Charles Sturt University

Faculty of Education - B Education (0-5)

Distance Student Orientation Session 2012

Thank you for attending our Distance Learning Orientation in 2012. This is the first time we have provided this activity and we are interested in your feedback to help future development of this.

Please fill in your responses over the session and return it at the end of your session.

Thank you.

Please rate the following aspects of the orientation sessions: 1 = very poor ... 5 = very good

1. Location of sessions

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
1	4	18	28	36	3

2.

Access to the venue

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	3	12	32	40	2

3. Answers to your questions

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	0	6	27	52	4

4. Presentations - (a) clarity

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	0	8	24	54	3

- b) amount & style of information

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	1	10	23	50	5

5. Any material handed out

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2	5	16	28	29	9

6. Chance to meet others in your course

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
1	6	17	24	36	5

7. Timing of session

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	2	12	34	39	2

8. Length of session

1	2	3	4	5	n/a
0	3	16	30	37	3

Appendix N. BIS Residential School Evaluation Results February 2011

Summary of Evaluation Responses for 79 Students attending the February 2011 BIS Residential School who commenced the course 201130

1. Were you provided with appropriate information by the University prior to the residential school?

Yes	No	Unsure/Maybe
66	13	0

2. Based on your experience, how useful was the residential school?

Slightly useful	Very useful	Not useful at all
8	69	2

3. Comment on 2 aspects you found to be helpful or particularly good.

Common answers:

Student Comment	Rate of Occurrence
Assignment writing and study skills session	21
Meeting other students and being able to network	33
Meeting academics who were supportive and helpful	31
Break down of subjects and going over subjects outlines/specializations	20
Overview on the Profession & Information about Career Paths	7
Guest Speakers	6
Interact session	9

4. Comment on 2 aspects you would like to see changed.

Common responses:

Student Comment	Rate of Occurrence
Increased time allocated to use the computers during Interact demonstration. (Not all students had a computer)	16
Allocated practical library sessions i.e. how to reserve a book.	8
Reverse the days (leave the things like assignment writing to the last day so that those who started in 201060 can leave early if needed)	4
Better use of the microphone – hard to hear. (Repeat what students ask so everyone can hear the question not just the answer)	4
Make PowerPoint presentations a resource on Interact	1
Assignment writing session could have been more structured	
Catering & accommodation standards (excluding BBQ & Dinner event)	20
More signage around campus and better maps in info booklet	10
Study skills session was repetitive & just a continuation of skills session	4
Have Q&A time at the end for continuity and less distractions and have a limit to this time	6
Inability to purchase texts from the Co-op bookshop while on campus	3
Not enough time between breaks to get to catering hall and back	7
Lack of transport and shuttle bus services	6

5. Why did you choose the BIS course:

Common responses:

Student Comment	Rate of Occurrence
Flexibility of online learning	27
Recommended by a colleague or peer who are previous CSU students	18
Career change	2
ALIA recognition and reputation of the course within the industry	23
For promotion in the industry and to gain qualifications/employment	14
Only course that met my needs (i.e. specializations)	11
Marketing by CSU (i.e. at conferences/ CIT Canberra etc.)	3
..... "some things are meant to be"	1

Summary of Evaluation Responses for 20 Students attending the February 2011 BIS Residential School who commenced the course in 201060

1. Were you provided with appropriate information by the University prior to the residential school?

Yes	No	Unsure/Maybe
13	7	0

2. Based on your experience, how useful was the orientation information?

Slightly useful	Very useful	Not useful at all
1	15	4

Reasons for why this information was useful:

Student comments	Rate of occurrence
Better idea of resources and e learning systems / interact	2
Great to go over course structure/study visits/placements	2
Great to connect with lecturers	3
Assignment writing session was helpful	2
Social contact with other students	3
Useful for general, overall clarification and reassurance	13

Reasons for why res school was not useful.

Student comments	Rate of occurrence
Most of the information I had already figured out	2
Interact session was a waste of time	3
The information would have been more useful 6 months ago	5

3. Would this information have helped you during your first session of study?

Yes	No	Unsure
18	2	0

Which part of the res school was the most useful?

Student comments	Rate of occurrence
Assignment writing assistance and study skills session	9
Interact session	1
Knowing we could send draft assignments to lecturers for feedback	3
Meeting lecturers and listening to guest speakers	7
Social interaction, meeting others (staff and students)	6
Information on specializations	2

Which part of the res school was least useful?

Student comments	Rate of occurrence
Interact session	7
Subject overview for subjects already completed	3

4. Would attending residential school for INF100 improved your grade for this subject?

Yes	No	Maybe
9	10	1