THETA 13

Enhancing Academic Outcomes in Online Open Education

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About Open Universities Australia

- Online higher and tertiary education, mostly open-entry
- Over 250,000 students across Australia since 1993
- Owned by 7 Australian universities (Curtin, Griffith, Macquarie, Monash, RMIT, Swinburne, UniSA)
- Offers over 1700 units and 180 qualifications from more than 20 education providers
What does OUA offer to students?

- Preparatory units, bridging units, vocational education & training (TAFE), undergraduate degrees and postgraduate qualifications
- Qualifications awarded by the university or tertiary institution
- Qualification is identical to that awarded to an on-campus student
Units and courses

• Wide range of units and courses:
  – Areas of study include:
    • Arts & humanities
    • Business
    • Education
    • Health
    • Information technology
    • Law & justice
    • Science & engineering

• FEE-HELP
  – Students enrolled in accredited units are eligible for FEE-HELP
  – Over 70% of OUA students use FEE-HELP
Majority mature-aged (>21), in paid employment and/or caring for children

Around a quarter of OUA students come from disadvantaged to most disadvantaged backgrounds according to the government SES scales

Around 50% of OUA students are first in family to come to university

As such, OUA students have multiple responsibilities, often with little prior educational experience, combined with lack of time, money or both....
Effective student engagement in tertiary education

Data from the AUSSE (Australasian Survey of Student Engagement; ACER):

- Engagement with the learning community is closely linked with student satisfaction & success

Student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes.

(Kuh et al., 2008)
Effective student engagement

- Access to support services makes a difference
- Correlation between use of support services and retention – those who have considered leaving are less likely to have accessed support services

Such findings are consistent with international research:

• e.g. UK study – Skilbeck (2006) identifies “a range of support services” as one of the key factors which contribute towards “good practice” in adult learning
Challenges for online student engagement

• How do we connect with students in a meaningful way when we never see them face-to-face?

• How do we help students connect with each other when they never come together as a group?

• How do we connect them with a learning community when they may be studying across two or more institutions?
Connection is the key!

Students need to feel connected with their academic institution, their teachers and fellow students.

Kuh refers to the:

*Compensatory effect* of student engagement for students who are *academically unprepared or first in their families to go to college*. (Kuh et al., 2008)
Student Engagement Cycle

- Completing a unit - *what next?*
- Cycle starts again

- Thinking about study

- Enrolling - making a commitment

- Waiting to start - reviewing decision

- Beginning study - transition

- First 3 weeks (getting to census date) - *will I keep going?*
# Academic support services

## PREP units

Four units focused on academic skills to help students in their transition to tertiary studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREP unit</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREP01 – Preparing for University Learning</td>
<td>[10 weeks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREP02 – Preparing for e-Learning</td>
<td>[self-paced, 26 weeks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREP03 – Preparing for University Learning</td>
<td>[Intensive, 3 weeks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREP04 – Preparing for Academic Writing</td>
<td>[6 weeks]</td>
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## Who are they for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School leavers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature-age students or returning students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation tertiary students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who need to refresh their academic skills</td>
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**Tutorial support through ‘Smarthinking’**

*Smarthinking* online tutorial support

- 24/7 online tutoring
- Online Writing Lab (OWL) where students submit a draft of their writing (assignment) for advice and guidance
- Submit a question: Students post a question for e-structors to respond to within 24 hours
- Live tutoring in a wide range of subject areas, both in live chat or through a pre-scheduled session
1. Tabs for easy access to account management
2. Breadcrumbs for easy navigation through the available services from any individual webpage
3. Section buttons to easily recognise the services on offer
Readiness for online study

Career Advice & Online Readiness Assessment

Online Readiness Assessment
Find out if you are ready to study online

Self assessment

Career Advice
Need help finding a career? Let our online career advice tool do the work.

Find a career
My Study Centre

STUDY BUDDIES

You are here: Home » My study centre » Study Buddies

Find a Study Buddy

Search by name, interests, units, location or course provider.

Keywords

FIND BUDDIES

My study buddies  Suggested buddies

Buddies (2)

Search your study buddies

Welcome

How complete is your profile?

Your profile is public

Update my profile

I'm working towards
Bachelor of Technology (Computing Studies)
Graduating
Personal Counselling & Career Guidance

• Appointment of full-time in-house Senior Wellbeing Counsellor in 2012; providing telephone and Skype counselling – developing e-counselling for 2013

• Online Career & Employment web site – resume writing, interview skills, job seeking, self assessment tools
Engaging via Social Media

• Use of electronic direct mail and social media and to keep students informed and engaged

OUA Facebook page

OUA Twitter feeds

OUA YouTube videos
Get updated on the latest news from OUA through daily posts, participate in regular trivia games and contribute to the discussion if you feel like.

Access OUA Apps and benefit from study tips and additional resources.

Chat with other OUA friends and share your experience.
Learn about …

new initiatives

student services

and much more…
YouTube videos

- informative
- instructional
- educational
Student Success Hub

- Use of ‘old’ technology (phone calls) enhanced by ‘new’ technologies (learning analytics; automated call software)
- Enabling targeted outreach to students likely to need one-to-one ‘coaching’ to help them succeed
- Pilot through second half of 2012 – now looking to expand through 2013
What difference do these strategies make to our students?
Impact of PREP units

Assumption
Enrolling in PREP units prior to or concurrently with another UGD unit has a positive impact on students’ success, engagement and grades.

A. Student success:
students starting with a preparatory unit are 1.43 times more likely to pass their first UGD unit

B. Student engagement:
high level of engagement with the LMS in PREP is correlated with a higher academic performance in the subsequent UGD unit
C. Student grades:
students starting with a PREP unit achieved a significantly higher proportion of Ds and HDs in both their first and second unit after PREP, thus showing that the results of PREP units are not short-lived.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Equivalent Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>N (Fail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>P/CP (Pass, Conceded pass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>C (Credit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>D (Distinction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>HD (High distinction)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Smarthinking on grades

the use of Smarthinking has a significantly positive effect on student academic outcomes, particularly for **new** students.

**Notes:**

1. Amongst all OUA students, pass rates are strikingly higher for Smarthinking users in ALL study periods, with almost double the incidence of Ds and HDs.

2. In particular, new students who used Smarthinking are by far more likely to pass their first units.
Impact of Smarthinking on engagement

The use of Smarthinking promotes a higher engagement with the unit material, which is reflected in a lower incidence of Fail (incomplete) grades.

Students who engaged with Smarthinking showed a considerably lower drop and withdrawal rate than those who didn’t use the service.
Impact of Student Success Hub Pilot SP3 2012

Comparing 500 students who were ‘coached’ with 500 students in the control group, the following results were demonstrated:

• Reduced unit withdrawal rate (before census date) by 50%
• Increased pass rate by 18%

Results from SP 4 looking similar.
Points of intervention in Student Engagement Cycle

Enabling units
(sharpening academic skills)

Smarthinking
(online tutorial support)

Student counselling
(online and phone support)

My Study Centre & Social Media
(connecting with peers)

Student Success Hub
(Student Coaching)

Online Readiness & Career Advisor
(online, self-assessed tools)

Enabling units
(preparing for academic learning)

New self-service enrolling system
(fully online)

My Study Centre & Social Media
(connecting with peers and gather information)

Completing a unit — what next? Cycle starts again

First 3 weeks (getting to census date) — will I keep going?

Beginning study — transition

Waiting to start — reviewing decision

Thinking about study

Enrolling — making a commitment
Student success does not arise by chance. It is the result of an intentional, structured, and proactive set of strategies that are coherent and systematic in nature and carefully aligned to the same goal.

(Tinto, 2009)
Thank you

Questions?

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