

## **Appendix 3B: Comparison of Transition Programs**

Easing the transition of students from school to university has been a feature of the Faculties of Science at the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney. The programs developed have targeted school leavers who form the bulk of the incoming student cohort at both universities. There are centrally run programs to inform parents and students at high school about the opportunities for study at both universities. In addition there are information days and welcome days run by the Faculties of Science to help students work out their choice of units of study.

- **Sydney Science Program**

Since 1996 the Faculty of Science at Sydney has a transition program consisting of a Faculty Workshop for incoming students and an associated Parents' Program.

The Workshop is held on a Sunday before the University Orientation Program. Attendance is voluntary and about 400 students register to attend. Six concurrent morning workshops for students are led by academics with a strong interest in first year students. Additional help is given on the day by other staff and by students recruited from the previous year's workshop. The theme of the workshop is "Helping to Make the Transition" and students are introduced to the workings of peer groups and how they could form them within their laboratory and tutorial sessions. A manipulation of the University timetable is done and this manipulation ensures that students will meet with one another in two practical/tutorial sessions every week. The Faculty Marketing Team organise the event from sending out invitations to our new students, to catering, to recruiting student helpers, etc. This is recognised as an important faculty event in helping to identify and establish relationships between new students and the Faculty. The event has also served in strengthening relations with current students (primarily those involved in the Faculty Student Society) and the Faculty.

The workshop finishes with the students having lunch together before a walking tour of the campus. Parents are invited to attend a session consisting of a series of talks, followed by a question and answer session and afternoon tea. Both the students' workshop and the parents' program are evaluated and the responses are overwhelmingly positive.

The students are asked to evaluate the morning program as a separate component of their whole day's activities (it was considered that getting a good response rate at the end of the day would be hard as many would have left during the afternoon sessions). The response by the students is very positive; almost all believe it is worthwhile with the formation of peer groups and related exercises being the most popular activities. Other aspects of the program that were well received included the information provided by staff talks and the *Orientation Manual*, and the "first year impressions" talks given by current students in higher years.

References to survey questions recorded that the majority of students attending the workshop are school leavers (90%) and under 19 years of age (96%). Most of them

have completed their schooling in Australia (94%) and 50% have attended Government schools while 45% have attended Catholic or private schools. The majority of the students in this group have at least one parent who has successfully completed a degree (74%) and for some students both parents hold a degree (49%). Just over three-quarters of them (80%) will have a job while studying but in the majority of cases this will be for 10 hours or less per week (87%). Nearly all students (97%) agree it is worthwhile attending. Students are pleased to have the opportunity to meet others and form peer groups and there are many comments each year specifically praising the common timetabling and grouping of people with similar subjects and career aspirations.

The parents are asked to fill in a short questionnaire at the end of the session. About 16% of the parents respond. The reasons given for attending on the day are to demonstrate support for daughter/son (59%), to get more information (30%) and looking for reassurance (8%). Most parents (89%) have discussed the transition with their son/daughter with the major perceived difference being the need for students to be more self-reliant/responsible for their study etc. (36% of responses to the open-ended question). Most parents (86%) feel that their son/daughter is well prepared for university. Generally, the responses from the parents indicated that their concerns have been covered and that they found the session stimulating.

#### **Sydney references:**

- Dalziel, J. & Peat, M. (1998) "Fostering collaborative learning during student transition to tertiary education: An evaluation of academic and social benefits" In *Improving Student Learning: Improving Students as Learners* Edited by C. Rust, The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, (272 – 283)
- Peat, M., Dalziel, J & Grant, A. M. (2001) Enhancing the First Year Student Experience by Facilitating the Development of Peer Networks through a One-day Workshop. *Higher Education Research & Development*, **20**, (2), 199-215
- Peat, M., Dalziel, J., & Grant, A. M. (2000) Enhancing the Transition to University by Facilitating Social and Study Networks: Results of a One-Day Workshop. *Innovations in Education and Training International* **37**, (4) 293-303
- Peat, M., Grant, A. M. & Dalziel, J. (2000) "The importance of forming social and academic networks for students in transition to university study" Paper presented at the Fourth Pacific Rim Conference for First Year in Higher Education: Creating Futures for a New Millennium, July, 2000, Brisbane.

#### **• Melbourne Science Program: Science 101**

The University of Melbourne strategic plan identifies as one of its main goals, student support and the Student Support Services identified first year transition as an area of focus. In 1998 a Transition Project Officer was appointed by Student Support Services who on a university-wide basis oversees issues of transition within the university. The Transition Program Manager in consultation with the coordinators of the four largest first year Science faculty subjects; Biology, Chemistry Mathematics and Physics, initiated Science 101. In the Faculty of Science there is a Transition Manager and other staff who have a proportion of their time set aside for transition. There is collaboration between the Dean, academic staff, Faculty administrative staff and Transition program staff plus support from staff in the Learning and Language skills unit.

#### ***How did the program begin?***

The Directors of large first year subjects (Biology, Chemistry, Maths and Stats and Physics) formed a "Director's Forum" The Directors met with the University

Transition Manager over an 18 month period to formulate a program. A Pilot Program was organised and ran in 2000 with three workshops and the formation of study groups. The aims of Science 101 are to:

- provide students who are new to University with a set of basic skills with which to tackle first year science subjects;
- create links for first year students to fellow students and members of staff within the Faculty;
- facilitate progress to second year Science; and
- familiarise students with the services available to them.

Science 101 is a voluntary program but it is included into each eligible student's timetable. The subject is now listed in the handbook (0 points) and appears on the student's transcript.

The Science 101 program saw a number of changes to its format from 2000 - 2003, based on the feedback from students completing questionnaires and participating in focus groups. The three main changes involved the delivery of two seminars, rather than three in 2000 - 2002, increased training and provision of information to the study group facilitators, and the production of a "First Year Resource Kit" for the participating students.

These changes appear to have been well received by all groups involved. Students seemed more willing to commit to two sessions rather than three so we experienced greater retention across the two weeks; 87% from week 1 to week 2 compared to 60% from week 1 to week 3 in 2002. On the whole the facilitators felt more confident about their roles and responsibilities and better resourced to service their study groups. The students found the Resource Kit a useful tool with the kit scoring 3.96 on a 1 – 5 scale as part of the evaluation. The workshops also rely on the students delivering the messages in a light-hearted way.

Similar programs in several other Faculties have been introduced since 2001, using the Science program as a model.

### ***Participating Students***

The program was allocated to the timetables of students in five of the Faculty's courses; BSc, BASc, BA/BSc, BCom/BSc and BSc/BIS. Within these five courses there were 982 commencing students. A total of 751 students participated in the Science 101 program – 76% of targeted students.

### ***Academic Performance Semester 1 2003***

Almost two-thirds of eligible students chose to participate in the Science 101 program, and academic performance appears to be matched for students who choose to participate and those who don't. Students commencing studies with ENTER scores at the lower end of the cohort who participate in Science 101 perform slightly better in their studies than those who did not participate. For students in the less than 85.00 ENTER cohort, rates of unsatisfactory progress in semester one are dramatically higher for non-participants in Science 101. Overall attending Science 101 is considered to be associated with causing the rate of unsatisfactory progress to fall by 20% in the first semester of the course.