

Improving the First Year Experience in the Science Faculty at The University of Melbourne

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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.

In the Faculty of Science most of the work on transition addresses the issue of transition from secondary school to University, although it is recognised that the move from undergraduate to graduate status is also a period of transition which has its own special problems.

Welcome Day

After a student has been offered a place in Science they are invited to attend Welcome Day where there is a market-place atmosphere created by each teaching department setting up an informative display to facilitate subject selection. Throughout the day staff from each subject area are present to answer questions. At specified times throughout the day the directors of the first year subjects run information sessions in their particular subject area. Students are given an appointment to meet individually with a course advisor before formally enrolling.

Orientation

During the week prior to the commencement of classes, sessions, conducted by the directors of first year subjects, provide preliminary information and advice to assist students with the commencement of classes the following week.

Learning Centres

Since 1998 the four largest first year subjects, Biology, Chemistry Mathematics and Physics have developed, or are in the process of developing, a First Year Learning Centre. The Learning Centres are spaces within each department set aside for first year students. Students can use the area to meet with other students or access resources. At prescribed times a staff member is in attendance to provide personal assistance. In Biology for instance, a member of the tutoring staff is present in the Learning Centre each day from 9.00 am until 2.00 pm.

Science 101

The Transition Program Manager in consultation with the directors of the four largest first year Science faculty subjects initiated a program to facilitate transition. In 2000 we are running a pilot of this program, Science 101. The aims of introducing Science 101 were:

- to provide students who were new to university with a set of basic skills with which to tackle first year science subjects;
- reduce the number of students who make unsatisfactory progress in first year; and
- creating early links for first year students to fellow students and members of the science faculty.

This program consists of 3, one hour workshops to which several different staff and students contribute and the organisation of study groups of 8-10, which the students coordinate for the remainder of the semester.

Parents Orientation Program

In March each year the parents of first year students are invited to attend the University where they meet the Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Science and tour the facilities of the teaching areas of the subjects in which their son/daughter may be enrolled.