

UWS Action Plan 2006

Retention Project

This project explicitly links and seeks to apply more systematically the many individual strategies which have been found to increase student retention at UWS. Not only is ensuring that all students who enrol in UWS graduate an important part of the University's mission but improved retention is also essential to optimise the University's income in a period of significant economic constraint. For example, a loss of just 30 UG students in first year costs the University well over a million dollars with a consequent negative impact on the funds available for services and salaries.

The retention project is comprised of a number of mutually reinforcing components. It is proposed that each component be coordinated by a team leader and action team responsible for its successful implementation. It is proposed also that there be an overall project manager to ensure that what each action team does links with and reinforces what the other teams are doing. In achieving the goals of their sub-project, each team will utilise the evidence of what is necessary to ensure productive student engagement with the University.

Key components of the Retention Project

The UWS retention project applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. It is made up of a mutually reinforcing set of sub-projects. What each sub-project addresses has been identified from the research as being a key factor in retaining UWS students. What is distinctive about this initiative is making sure that there is consistent application of good practice in each of the following areas across UWS:

- student orientation;
- student enrolments and fees process;
- provision of convenient contact for students with queries and prompt & effective resolution of them;
- consistent attention to the key factors known to engage students in productive learning in their first 12 months of study at UWS;
- clear expectations management, especially in terms of assessment;
- provision of timely and effective student support including appropriate use of WebCT, easy access to UWS student support services, the consistent use of peer mentors and complementary support from the UWS Student Associations.

UWS sponsors

The project sponsor, Professor Geoff Scott, is responsible for ensuring that the initiative has the support of the UWS Executive, that what is happening is widely understood and supported by those who are to implement it, that each of the project's components are being successfully put into practice and that any areas requiring executive action during implementation are being dealt with promptly and wisely.

Coordination of project components

The overall project coordinator is Professor Stuart Campbell, Associate PVC Quality, whose job is to support and link each of the project components and to monitor their implementation and assist project leaders to address emerging areas for improvement promptly and wisely. He has the support of Ms Kim Jarvis, who is on secondment to OPQ from the academic secretariat.

Project component leaders

Each of the key components of the UWS Retention Project has a team leader who is responsible for ensuring that good practice is consistently implemented across the university in the area concerned. Details of each project component and their UWS team leader are as follows.

- **Orientation:**

Team leader: Ellen Brackenreg

- i. Ensure that students get a consistently high quality orientation experience;
- ii. Clear expectations management from the outset about key UWS processes, support systems and student requirements;
- iii. Welcome by senior staff - same message at all orientations
 1. Wisdom of your choice;
 2. Support available;
 3. Who to go to if you want help or are unclear about anything;
 4. UWS listens to its students: thus this new strategy;
- iv. International component: links to GWS communities; senior buddies.

- **Accurate enrolments, fee invoices, registration on UWS student system**

Team leader: Thea Seabrook

- i. Error management strategy for fees and enrolments in place, with clear targets to reduce error rate;
- ii. Clear and consistent processes in place to track and rectify errors promptly and inform students about what is happening with their concerns.

- **Convenient & effective system for students to contact UWS with queries**

Team leader: Ellen Brackenreg

- i. Any one or a mix of the following areas have been found to be an initial contact point for students with queries about academic or administrative matters:
 1. The Library;
 2. IT contact staff;
 3. Student Centres;
 4. Student Administration staff in Colleges;
 5. Academic advisors and first year teachers;
 6. UWS Call Centre staff.
- ii. Staff at each point of contact need a consistent and effective way of responding. With this in mind, customer inquiry and service protocols are being developed. These are based on an analysis of formal UWS complaints over the past two years and recurring areas in student feedback where things are reported to have gone wrong. The findings for staff dealing with student concerns include the need to: actively listen and record the exact nature of the query, have a clear process to be followed to address the type of query expressed, to inform the student of what will happen next, then to ensure the student is

contacted at the time agreed with news of the outcome. It also requires consistent records to be kept of what is happening with concerns and an understanding of who is best positioned to resolve different sorts of queries. An online system is currently being developed to address this need.

- iii. All new students need to receive a personalised email reminder or equivalent on the key things to be done during the first two months of enrolment.
- iv. A small fold out list of services and who to contact for particular concerns is under development for distribution at orientation.

- **Student Support**

- **Team leader: Ellen Brackenreg**

- i. Systematic use of peer mentors for all new students; targeted supplemental instruction for units with high attrition rates; clear processes to consistently identify and assist 'at risk' students.
- ii. It is proposed that class lecturers identify students most at risk early on and that these students are contacted personally by A/Dean (Academic) and/or the Head of School or Program Head to advise them on the support services available and contacts these services on behalf of the student. With this in mind all program heads will be asked to ensure staff are aware of their College's student services contact person (phone and email) and the range of services to which they can refer at-risk students
- iii. It is proposed that a Student Support at UWS pamphlet be produced to facilitate this process and that a link to this be provided as part of *WebCT*.
- iv. It is critical that all staff with whom students have contact know the full range of support which is available to students and take active steps to alert students to these areas of support
- v. The UWS student association plays an important support role in this regard and their full range of support services should also be made known to students as part of the same process.

- **Web Support**

- **Team leaders: EDC and Liz Curach**

- i. Ramp up the effective and consistent use of *WebCT* as an interactive learning tool, based on an evaluation of what aspects of the system are proving to be most productive as an adjunct to student learning.
- ii. Monitor and assist staff and student use of *WebCT*.

- **Optimising the Classroom Experience**

- **Team leaders: centrally - EDC; locally - Associate Deans Academic and Program Heads**

- i. Head of School and/or A/Dean to visit the first session of each class to give an overview of the elements of the UWS retention project outlined in this briefing document, pointing out that the approach being taken addresses what thousands of previous UWS students say works best for them and that this covers the total experience of UWS not just what happens in the classroom. It is suggested that all of the systems

available to support students and address their concerns be briefly outlined, that the successes of graduates in the program be summarised, and that the many opportunities open to UWS students are identified, including exchanges, opportunities to meet international students, undertake cooperative education placements, use credit transfer options etc.

- ii. Ensure the systematic use the College's best teachers in all 1st year classes;
- iii. Ensure that, in the first semester of the course, at least one professor outlines the research being undertaken in the College/School in the area being studied;
- iv. Undertake a survey of students in first class and acknowledge its findings in terms of the wide background, abilities, needs and experience of the current class and how this will be taken into account in how the class is taught.
- v. Ensure consistent use of 'learn in your own time' materials with a focus addressing the key quality management for assessment issues identified in the joint papers of Geoff Scott and Nigel Bond distributed to Colleges in 2004. One example is the Unit Planning Guide given the Edith Cowan students and identified as an area of good practice by AUQA.

Geoff Scott & Nigel Bond