

Student Retention Policy

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) This Policy replaces Chapter 3.10 of the Academic Policy (December 2010).

Section 2 - Definitions

(2) For the purpose of this Policy refer to the Academic Board's Definitions Policy.

Section 3 - Introduction

(3) This Policy outlines a whole-of-university approach to improving student retention and supporting students to successfully complete their studies at Southern Cross University. It is informed by the following principles:

- a. Policies aimed at improving student retention must focus on creating the broad conditions for all students' success, rather than focusing solely on academically 'at risk' students.
- b. The quality of a student's experience at university depends not only on good teaching, but on quality administrative systems, student support systems and learning resources
- c. Learning is a social experience and universities have a responsibility to engage students with the academic and social culture of the institution, and provide opportunities for the building of learning communities.
- d. Assessment drives learning. Students require authentic and engaging assessment tasks, clear guidelines about marking and grading, timely and constructive feedback, and a consistent approach to assessment, marking and grading and feedback across units in a course.
 - i. Scott, G Implementing effective approaches to student engagement and retention in Australian Universities
 - ii. Tinto, V. (2005) Epilogue: moving from theory to practice. In Seidman, A. (ed.) College student retention: formula for student success Westport, Connecticut: Praeger
 - iii. Yorke, M. and Longden, B. (2004) Retention and student success in higher education. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press

(4) This Policy also outlines early intervention strategies for potentially academically at risk students. Drawing on research by DEST (2003), and the SCU Report of the Retention Working Party on Improving Retention (2004) the following are categories of potentially academically at risk students (these categories should be individually examined at School and College level):

- a. external students
- b. first year students
- c. part-time students
- d. school leavers with low ATAR
- e. students who have not engaged in formal studies for a substantial period of time
- f. students with large work commitments and/or family responsibilities

- g. students with financial problems
- h. students enrolled in courses with high attrition rates
- i. offshore international students
- j. late or mid-year enrolments
- k. students who are slow to engage with their studies
- l. students with language difficulties
 - i. Note that students may fall into more than one category. Particular categories may have more relevance to some Schools and Colleges.

Section 4 - Objectives

(5) The objectives of this Policy are to:

- a. articulate a whole of university approach, with a focus on the first year experience, to improving student retention and student success at Southern Cross University including enhancing preparedness for study, enhancing the first year experience, ensuring a quality curriculum and authentic, engaging assessment with timely feedback and clear expectations about standards;
- b. formalise early interventions and strategies which target and support identified academically at risk categories of students; and
- c. describe a reporting process by which Head of Schools / Head of Colleges report to Academic Board, through Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and the Vice Chancellor on student retention rates, e.g. through the Faculty Course Performance Summary Report.

Section 5 - Content and Implementation

(6) The content of this Policy supplements the Assessment Policy, Academic Standing of Students Policy, Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Policy and the Course Review Policy.

(7) The Policy offers a framework and strategies that School/College, Faculties and service units within the University can implement in order to meet the target identified in the Academic Plan 2005-2008:

5.4 Quality - Improvement in Student Retention

'Student retention rates to be improved by 2% per year for each School/College and Faculty over the next 3 years.'

(8) The planning and implementation of strategies, and the reporting of outcomes, is the responsibility of the Head of Schools /Head of Colleges /Head, Departments and the Pro Vice Chancellor through their School/College or Faculty Management Plans, and Head, Service Units through service plans.

Improve Preparedness for University Study

(9) The University has a responsibility to provide prospective students with:

- a. appropriate information and support to allow them to make informed choices about future study
- b. opportunities to identify their own preparedness for study, potential risk factors to success, and the support services available to them

c. opportunities to develop the necessary skills for success in higher education.

(10) The University will place particular emphasis on meeting the needs of potentially academically at risk students.

(11) The University will:

- a. provide and maintain, on the University website, School/College based web sites and in other marketing material, clear and accessible information about courses, support services and contact details for more information.
- b. emphasise in its marketing materials the University's commitment to preparing students for studies at Southern Cross University or another institution.
- c. provide and maintain an 'Are you Ready for University?' website which hosts the resources: Thinking about University? and the What's Expected of Me at University CD, and contains an online self-assessment quiz which enables students to evaluate their own preparedness for study, potential risk factors to success, and the support services available to them.
- d. provide Tertiary Preparation Programs, delivered by the Academic Skills unit, at the Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Gold Coast campuses.
- e. provide a flexible learning Success program for students unable to attend on campus courses.
- f. provide flexible learning Tertiary Preparation Programs for students unable to attend on campus courses.
- g. ensure that enrolment procedures are seamless, easy and friendly.

(12) Responsibility for assisting students to be well prepared for study at Southern Cross University lies with:

- a. Head of Schools /Head of Colleges
- b. Technology Services
- c. Academic Skills unit
- d. Marketing and Recruitment
- e. Student Administration Services

Support the First Year Experience

(13) The University has a responsibility to provide students in their first year of study at University with:

- a. an appropriate orientation to the social and academic culture of the University;
- b. information about the various forms of assistance and student support services available on all campuses and externally;
- c. targeted intervention and support for those students who have not engaged with their studies by census date and/or who fail early assessment tasks; and
- d. opportunities within each course to participate in community building activities such as peer mentoring schemes.

(14) The University will place particular emphasis on meeting the needs of potentially academically at risk students.

(15) The University will ensure that:

- a. external students are offered a similar O Week experience to that of internal students.
- b. all students are well advised by website information and email of the various forms of assistance and student support services (both academic and pastoral) available on all campuses and externally.
- c. all students are well advised of the procedures and deadlines for withdrawing from a unit without failure, or withdrawing from the University before the census date, and of sources of advice that are available in relation

to these steps.

- d. an online assessment item will be included in the curriculum of one first year core unit in each course across the University, due prior to the census date for that teaching period. Students who have not engaged with this assessment item will be contacted by a member of staff who will assist the student to identify factors which may be inhibiting their studies.
- e. all students who do not submit work, or who fail early assessment tasks in one or more units in their first teaching period will be contacted by a member of staff and referred to Learning Assistance or other appropriate help. They will also be advised whether there are any late submission or resubmission options and their options in relation to withdrawal.
- f. the Academic Standing of Students Policy is implemented.
- g. there will be centrally organised peer mentoring programs available in all undergraduate courses across the University. These will encompass first year internal students at Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Gold Coast campuses.
- h. commencing external students are offered equitable opportunities to participate in community building programs similar to those provided to internal students. One or more of the following strategies shall be used by School/College when supporting external students:
 - i. Utilise a range of technologies to provide students with an orientation to the School/ College, the University and its services.
 - ii. Hold a residential workshop as early as possible in the study period.
 - iii. Introduce staff to external students using a range of technologies.
 - iv. Deliver all study materials to students prior to commencement of the study period.
 - v. Dedicate a Student Liaison Officer or a member of academic staff to external students.
 - vi. Ensure that students are familiar with relevant technologies for learning and teaching.
 - vii. Ensure peer mentoring is available.
 - viii. Ensure all external students have the opportunity to personally interact with School/College staff relevant to their studies.
 - ix. Provide and maintain a web site for their students that includes that includes a prominent link to University support services.
- i. appropriate measures be put in place so that late enrolling students have access to materials, [MySCU](#) and mentoring.
- j. commencing on campus and off shore international students are offered equitable opportunities to participate in orientation and community building programs. Contractual agreements with partner organisations will facilitate this objective. One or more of the following strategies shall be used by School/College when supporting these students:
 - i. Peer mentoring between local and international students.
 - ii. Provision of CD ROM What's expected of me at University: Academic Skills for International Students to all international students.

(16) Responsibility for assisting students to engage early with the academic and social culture of Southern Cross University and have a supported first year experience lies with:

- a. Marketing and Recruitment
- b. Student Administration Services
- c. Academic Skills unit
- d. Teaching and Learning Centre
- e. Technology Services
- f. Head of School /Head of College

- g. Pro Vice Chancellor
- h. Course Coordinator
- i. First year Unit Assessors and teachers

Track Student Progress

(17) The Academic Standing of Students Policy contains a number of processes for tracking student progress and should be read in conjunction with this Policy.

(18) Responsibility for ensuring that student progress is tracked centrally and that student progress data is used by School/Colleges/Departments to improve student retention lies with:

- a. Student Administration Services
- b. Committee of Examiners
- c. School Boards /College Boards
- d. Unit Assessors.

Administrative Attrition

(19) The University will provide targeted intervention for those students who request deferral, leave of absence or a withdrawal from their course:

- a. Students who request deferral, leave of absence or a withdrawal from their course will be offered an interview.
- b. Students should be fully informed of any available options to change their enrolment.
- c. Students who have deferred, have withdrawn from the University, have not re-enrolled or are on leave of absence shall be automatically contacted one study period before the next relevant enrolment date.

(20) Responsibility for ensuring that administrative attrition is recorded, monitored and followed up lies with:

- a. Pro Vice Chancellor
- b. Student Administration Services
- c. Head of School /Head of College /Colleges.

Curriculum and Assessment

Student Assessment

(21) This Policy coheres with the Assessment Policy for all matters related to student assessment.

(22) Responsibility for the curriculum and student assessment lies with:

- a. Course Coordinators
- b. Pro Vice Chancellor
- c. Technology Services
- d. Head of Schools /Head of Colleges
- e. Academic Skills unit
- f. Teaching and Learning Centre
- g. Unit Assessors and teachers.

Staff

(23) The University has a responsibility to ensure that all students, but particularly first year students and external students, experience quality teaching and quality administrative support.

(24) The University will ensure that:

- a. a member of academic staff is appointed and appropriately resourced to take responsibility for the first year student experience. This may include but is not limited to Course Coordinators
- b. Faculty/School/College workload models include an additional loading for teaching first year units
- c. all teachers involved in first year units, including sessional staff, undergo professional development in areas such as effective teaching techniques; assessment, marking, grading and feedback; exploring issues with external students; how to identify academically at risk students; how to guide students towards realistic choices; and where and how to refer students to forms of academic and personal support
- d. all general staff whose prime responsibility is student liaison undergo compulsory professional development. Topics will include: exploring issues with external students; how to identify academically at risk students; how to guide students towards realistic choices; and where and how to refer students to forms of academic and personal support.

(25) Responsibility for ensuring that academic and administrative staff are prepared and resourced to provide quality teaching and support to students lies with:

- a. Pro Vice Chancellors
- b. Head of Schools /Head of Colleges
- c. Head, Organisational Management Units.

Reporting

(26) Regular attrition data at the course and unit level should be distributed to School/ Colleges/Departments.

(27) Student attrition is to be a standing item on the agenda of Committee of Examiners across the University.

(28) Reports on progress regarding retention and implementation of this Policy shall be made annually by Pro Vice Chancellor to Academic Board who shall report to the Vice Chancellor.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	14th August 2012
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Head of Work Unit	Andrew Rose Chair, Academic Board +61 2 66203189
Enquiries Contact	Governance Services