Mind the Gap: Student and Staff Expectations and Experiences
RSA Brinkworth, School of Medical Sciences & B McCann, School of Humanities
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/altc/expectations

The transition from secondary to tertiary education can be a challenging experience, especially if you do not find what you expect.

Despite considerable and enhanced efforts over the last fifteen years to bridge the high school to university gap: 1

• 60% of school leavers still feel secondary school did not adequately prepare them for university.
• 33% experience early ‘reality shock’ when their first semester marks are lower than expected.

Failing to address mismatches between student expectations of university and experiences once there has ramifications for satisfaction and retention.

The project will explore all view points by gathering opinions of students alongside high school teachers, university lecturers, tutors and demonstrators.

We will track students as they progress and compare their expectations with experiences, entrance scores and university grades including transfers and attrition.

New challenges include calls for: 2

• 40% of Australians 25-34 to have degree by 2025.
• 20% of university enrolments to be students from a low socio-economic background.

Pressures on secondary teachers to get students into university may lead to unrealistic student expectations:

• Higher levels of individual attention and feedback. 3
• Mismatch of student and lecturer learning styles. 4

Pilot work at the University of Adelaide has shown:

• Students know university is going to be different but they do not correctly predict where or how large these differences will be. 5
• There is little difference between expectations and experiences of different student cohorts. 6
• Students expectations move to match those of lecturers over time. 5

The aims of the current project are to:

• Provide a common forum for bringing school teachers, university academics and professional staff closer.
• Expand existing pilot studies to all three universities in SA as well as the secondary school sector.
• Understand the interaction between a student’s expectations, experiences, entrance scores and grades.
• Better prepare students for transition by widely communicating the results of the study.
• Develop working relationships between universities (academic and administrative areas) and high schools.
• Produce an evidence base for expectations and experiences of students during transition and utilise it to support and develop current transition strategies.

2010 Commencing Student Survey Responses

Responses by Study Area

Responses by University

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