Exploring assumptions about the first year at university and how it can differ from reality

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Workshop Outline

- Context and demographics
- Student preparation
- Student expectations and performance
- Break
- Student predictions and reflections
- Considerations of what you can do
- Resources
**Aim:** to explore the gaps between student expectations and experiences of university and how this can be minimised

- 3 year research project, conducted at and by the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia (2010–2012)

- The first grant was awarded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council

- Office of Learning and Teaching Extension Grant to disseminate the findings across Australia (2013–2014)
The SSEE Project

- Examine student expectations and experiences across 3 South Australian institutions (1 ATN; 1 Go8; 1 IRU)
- Two 76 question surveys
- Five surveys over 3 years 2010–2012
- Surveying commencing and continuing students
- Look at expectations and actual experience
## Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commencing</th>
<th>Continuing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flinders</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Adelaide</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>6621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UniSA</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>5411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7366</td>
<td>9517</td>
<td>16883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25% response rate
What do you think?

Secondary education adequately prepares students for university
Secondary education adequately prepared me for university study

Commencing

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
N/A

Continuing

0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
Entry pathways to university

- 59% High School
- 15% Gap year / deferral
- 4% Foundation course
- 3% Transfer
- 4% TAFE (or similar)
- 5% Work
- 11% Other
## Results & Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Type</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>First in Family</th>
<th>Metro’n School</th>
<th>Live with parents</th>
<th>Mature Aged</th>
<th>Average Age (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commencing</td>
<td>7361</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing</td>
<td>9509</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>16870*</td>
<td>11286</td>
<td>5299</td>
<td>12534</td>
<td>9531</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While we received over 18,000 responses, respondents who indicated they were not attending university for the first time were removed from commencing student cohort.
First in Family vs not First in Family
Demographics

FiF: ATAR = 79.76 ± 0.52
Not FiF: ATAR = 84.15 ± 0.31
Mature Aged vs School Leavers Demographics

MA: ATAR = 72.63±0.76
SL: ATAR = 85.44±0.26
Are students satisfied?

- Overall, students anticipated a high level of satisfaction from their university experience
  - (8.13 ± 1.39)

- After a semester of university study students had a good level of satisfaction
  - (7.21 ± 1.71)

- After a semester of university study students still found their university experience more satisfactory than their high school experience
  - (7.08 ± 2.38)
What does a student need to be successful at university?

- Balanced life
- Engage (attendance?)
- Support from the institution
- Work hard
- Friends
Are friends important?

Having a group of close friends will be important for support at university
Are any of your friends attending the same university?

- Yes and in same degree / program
- Yes but not in the same degree / program
- No
Do students have realistic expectations of what university will be like?
What shaped students’ views or accurately reflected university?

- Helped shape my views
- Accurately reflected what uni would be like

Bar chart showing the percentage of students who found various sources helpful in shaping their views of university. Sources include:
- Parents / primary...
- School careers...
- School teachers
- Older siblings or...
- Friends
- Traditional Media...
- New Media (e.g.  )
- University websites
- University...
- Other
FIF – What shaped expectations of Uni?

Commencing

- School Teachers
- School careers...
- Parents/ primary...
- Older siblings or...
- Friends
- Traditional Media
- New Media
- University websites
- Uni recruiting...
“development and learning unfold along individual pathways, whose trajectories are shaped by the ongoing interplay between sources of vulnerability, competence and resilience” (Glover, Hetzel, Tennant & Leahy, 2010: 12)

1. What points of interest have been raised so far?

After the break:

- What might help predict student success?
- Student views and things you might consider?
Does entrance score predict GPA?

No linear correlation

Correlation Coefficient ($R^2$) = 0.135
Does entrance score predict GPA?

Correlation Coefficient ($R^2$) = 0.975 Commencing
= 0.966 Continuing

Non-linear mapping
Does school type predict entrance score?

![Bar chart showing ATAR% for Catholic, Independent, Public, and IB schools.]

- Catholic: 75%
- Independent: 80%
- Public: 75%
- IB: 90%


Does school type predict entrance score?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>ATAR (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The IB school has the highest ATAR compared to Catholic, Independent, and Public schools.
Does school type predict GPA?

![Bar chart showing GPA (0-7) by school type: Catholic, Independent, Public, IB]
Does school type predict GPA?

Zoomed in

GPA (/7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does age predict GPA?

Correlation Coefficient ($R^2$) = 0.00553
Gender Gap?

![Bar chart showing GPA differences between males and females.](chart)

Significant difference
No significant difference
Family Background?

![Bar graph showing GPA (scaled 1-7) for FiF (First in Family) and not FiF. The graph indicates a significant difference.](image)
Small group discussion

From our presentation to this point:

1. Does our SA experience translate to your institutions?

2. What is the MOST important transition issue(s) affecting commencing university students?
What do you think influences students’ degree choice?

- Continue in an area already started
- Did not get first preference
- Develop talent and creativity
- Expectations of family and/or friends
- Gain entry to another degree program
- Improve job prospects/earning potential
- Interest
- Recommendations of teachers/counsellors
- Other
I am doing my program because...
What are student views regarding the differences between university and high school?
Do students value attending lectures?

- **It will be important for me to attend most lectures**
- **It was important for my learning to attend most lectures**

![Bar chart showing student opinions on the importance of attending lectures](chart.png)
Do students’ outside commitments affect study?

- I have commitments / activities outside of University that might negatively affect my ability to study.
- I had outside commitments / activities that negatively affected my ability to study.
What is their self assessment?

(Commencing) I am a capable student...

- Agree: 86.8%
- Disagree: 13.2%

(Continuing) I did as well as expected..

- Agree: 64.4%
- Disagree: 35.6%
Are staff accessible?

- Having easy and convenient access to my lecturers and tutors outside of face-to-face teaching will be important to my learning.
- I had easy and convenient access to my lecturers and tutors outside of face-to-face teaching times.
What is a reasonable time for having your assignments / work marked and returned to you?

What was the average time for assignments / work to be marked and returned to you?
Feedback on drafts of work will be important to my learning.

Feedback on drafts of work was provided.
Feedback on my submitted work will be important to my learning.

Sufficient feedback on my submitted work was provided.
Having lecturers who are enthusiastic about teaching will be important for my learning.

I learned more in classes taught by enthusiastic teachers.
References


Heagney, Margaret. (2012). *University Selection: Can It Be Equitable and Excellent?* Paper presented at the Student Diversity in Higher Education: Conflicting Realities Tensions affecting policy and action to widen access and participation, 20th Anniversary Conference of the EAN at VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [www.ean-edu.org](http://www.ean-edu.org)
Acknowledgements

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SSEE Project team

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Carrickalinga writing retreat 2012