University is a scary and alien environment for many year 12 school students and their parents. Along with a new physical environment, first year students need to adapt to a new learning style, personal and social freedoms not previously enjoyed and a whole new level of commitment and responsibility.

When families consider these changes, as their children complete year 12, there are many questions and uncertainties. How will their child cope? How do they, as parents help their child make this adjustment? What should they expect? How can they best support their child whilst encouraging this growing independence? Where can they turn for help? As practitioners working with first year students, this theme is recurrent. It was the consistency of these questions that started us thinking about assisting year 12 students and their parents prepare *before* they walk into university for the first time.

In 2004, following a presentation at a local youth forum, we were approached by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) to discuss this issue and see if we could offer any ideas about services that could assist families in planning for this transition. These discussions grew into a partnership between DET and ourselves where we developed a program (seminar and print material) called ‘*School to University: possibilities and challenges*’.

In 2005, the program was piloted in metropolitan and regional areas of Western Australia by ourselves with staff from DET assisting. Since then, we have handed over our material to DET, who have subsequently developed a training package to equip their network of employees statewide with the knowledge and resources to deliver this seminar right across Western Australia. The nature and scope of this development has resulted in the program winning the ‘Innovation in transition programs’ category in the 2005 Career Development Awards at the Career Education Association – Western Australia Biennial Conference.

Although the idea of running information sessions about transition for year 12 students is not new, this program offers an alternative approach on two levels. Firstly, it engages parents as well as students in the process of preparing for transition to university. This is a critical element of the program as parents often feel disenfranchised when it becomes clear that they are no longer partners in their child’s education. There is a big shift when the relationship changes from being between school, child and parent in secondary school to being between the university and student in a tertiary environment.
Secondly, the program represents new possibilities in a resource challenged environment as it allows staff working with first year students to share their knowledge and strategies without the need to have a high resource commitment. This notion was at the forefront of our minds when we engaged in this process as there was always the very clear understanding that our core responsibility is to the students currently enrolled at our institution. Therefore, we needed to develop ways in which we could reach a large (and geographically dispersed) audience without needing to be integrally involved with the actual delivery.

In this nuts and bolts session, we would like to:

- Explore the process we undertook in the development of this program. We have identified that there were six distinct stages that we will outline in the presentation:
  - Initial discussions and framework
  - Material development
  - Logistics and promotion
  - Pilot program
  - Evaluation and handover
  - Development and dissemination of delivery training manual
- Outline the pros and cons of developing partnerships similar to our own with agencies external to the University environment. At times the partnership has been challenging and as a result we have insights that might assist others considering similar partnerships.
- Discuss the development of the content of this program with particular emphasis on why and how we have included parents in the program.
- Outline our evaluation strategies and discuss how the evaluation has shaped the further development of the program.
- Share the material we have developed to inspire others to develop similar ideas in their area.
- Engage our audience in further discussion about the program and seek feedback and explore others practitioner’s experiences, ideas and innovations.

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