

**Effective teaching and support of students
from low socioeconomic status backgrounds:**
Resources for Australian higher education

STUDY SKILLS SUPPORT

University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

Applying the practical advice from the LSES resources

The Australian Office for Learning and Teaching funded project **Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education (SP10-1838 2011-2012)** focused on identifying and making explicit a series of succinct guidelines to assist the teaching and support of students who come to university with varying diversity in terms of their preparedness for higher education, and social and cultural capital. Two major resources were produced in the form of booklets: **Practical Advice for Institutional Policy Makers and Leaders** and **Practical Advice for Teaching Staff** which highlighted the policy frameworks, programs and practices that had facilitated the success of students from LSES backgrounds. The findings are applicable to a range of higher education contexts and appropriate to be taken up to enhance the teaching and support of all students, irrespective of their background.

Four national workshops were conducted in 2013/2014 (South Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and Queensland). Participants had the opportunity to actively engage with the practical advice and guidelines that arose from the project and to consider the application of these findings to their institutional contexts.

Workshop outcomes:

- An understanding of the social cultural incongruity conceptual framework.
- An understanding of the key themes emerging from the data.
- An understanding of how to apply the findings in your context/institution.

Workshop leader/s: Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University), Ms Liz Smith (Charles Sturt University) and Professor Karen Nelson (University of the Sunshine Coast)

The resources produced provide guidelines and best practice information and strategies for institutional staff involved with Low SES cohorts:

Project website: <http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/resources.htm>

Practical Advice for Institutional Policy Makers and Leaders:
<http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/leaders.htm>

Practical Advice for Teaching Staff: <http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/teachers.htm>

The outcomes of the workshop produced a small number of vignettes as a way of detailing/exemplifying how these proposed strategies are implemented in the institutional context. The following details the **Study Skills Support** activities at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

Study Skills Support

Overview

The University of Adelaide's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) runs a series of initiatives under the banner of study skills support, coordinated by staff in the Study Skills Clinic [SSC] for current and prospective students. To date, attendance data indicates that a significant number of those students utilising the services of the Clinic are culturally and linguistically diverse or LSES students. The Clinic has also become a key point of contact for equity services across the University seeking to refer clients to a Faculty-based service for academic support.

The SSC provides academic literacy support for all students, but specifically the first year cohort. The Clinic is a dedicated place for students to receive one-on-one support around research techniques, essay brainstorming, composition and revision, as well as advice on course selection. The Clinic also has a regular 'drop in' day each week.

The SSC runs a Facebook page for first year students and has produced a series of online modules for students, serving as mini tutorials on academic essay writing, research, referencing, grammar and other key skills. The tutorials can be accessed by enrolled students and those considering university study and are intended to prepare HUMSS students for their first semester courses. They cover key skills HUMSS students are assessed on; they also contain exercises and links to resources in the Faculty and University. Promotion of these modules begins prior to orientation and the beginning of the semester and there is also promotion via outreach activities in the local schools.

The SSC has also partnered with key community stakeholders to work with prospective students in the northern suburbs of Adelaide (viewed as one of the most disadvantaged areas of Adelaide). It is currently working closely with NASSSA [Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance], an organisation that provides curriculum support to a majority of high schools in the region. With NASSSA and its partner schools, the SSC is delivering a program of modules in creative writing, public speaking and design, which students undertake as part of their studies. All participants are creating pieces that will be showcased both in their local community and at the University of Adelaide, and the pieces will also be digitally archived. This program uses the engagement strategy of allowing students to write about their own situations and communicate in their own voices. It is designed to equip students with both the confidence and the key skills in areas such as communication and research that will allow them to transition smoothly to university.

Reflecting on good practice.

Relationship building is a critical factor in promoting and disseminating the proactive work of the Study Skills Support initiatives. The Transition and Participation team work closely with the First Year coordinators in the Faculty to disseminate the study skills activities. The team also recognises that students are time-poor and answer student questions via email and make themselves available for one-to-one consultations by appointment.

Applying the practical advice from the LSES resources

The team is looking to get academics more involved in the teaching and scaffolding of online modules with the idea of embedding some of these resources into courses as well as remaining on offer to all students.

Currently the Transition and Participation team are running a workshop for new tutors in the HUMSS faculty. The workshops entitled *Supporting students from low SES backgrounds in your tutorials* will disseminate research from the original LSES OLT report and resources such as the *Practical advice for teaching staff* by discussing those findings in the context of what Humanities and Social Science course tutors might encounter in their specific roles. Additionally, a one hour online module using the Articulate Storyline software is being prepared to provide more extensive information about HEPPP¹ and the Bradley Report, advice and information from the LSES OLT report, as well as updates about university resources.

¹ The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) aims to ensure that Australians from low SES backgrounds who have the ability to study at university get the opportunity to do so. It provides government funding to assist universities listed in Table A of the Higher Education Support Act 2003. <https://education.gov.au/higher-education-participation-programme-heppp>

The aim is to make new tutors aware of the potential needs of students from low SES backgrounds, and to be prepared to support them using much of the key advice provided in the resources.

The activities previewed here align directly to six key pieces of advice provided from the *Resources for Australian higher education: Practical advice for teachers* - and specifically the following:

Advice #1: Know and respect your students

Advice #2: Offer your students flexibility, variety and choice

Advice #5: Be available and approachable to guide student learning

The activities previewed here align directly to five key pieces of advice provided from the *Practical advice for institutional policy makers and leaders* – and specifically the following:

Advice #1: Enable inclusive curriculum and assessment design

Advice #3: Encourage 'help-seeking' by students

Advice #5: Resource and support teachers of LSES students

More information:

The HUMSS (Humanities and Social Sciences) Study Skills Clinic: <http://www.hss.adelaide.edu.au/current-students/support/>

Academic Modules: <http://www.hss.adelaide.edu.au/current-students/support/academic-skills/>

NASSA: <http://www.nasssa.com.au/>

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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Dr Stephanie Hester & Dr Jillian Schedneck

- Email or call us to book an appointment:
• humss.support@adelaide.edu.au
- Or drop in to see us on Wednesdays in the Hub's Writing Centre from 11am to 4pm during the semester!

In drafting and developing this vignette, the project acknowledges the invaluable assistance of Dr Stephanie Hester, Transition and Participation Officer, from the University of Adelaide, who participated in the South Australian workshop on September 25, 2013 and Dr Jillian Schedneck, Transition and Participation Assistant, University of Adelaide.