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

# TERTIARY PREPARATION PATHWAY

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 Australian 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 **Tertiary Preparation Pathway** activities at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia.

# Tertiary Preparation Pathway (TPP)

## Overview

Since 2006 the Tertiary Preparation Pathway (TPP) program has been offered at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and has been designed to offer further education opportunities for the local community, particularly those who had not previously attained an OP[1] or who had not participated in formal education for some time (mature-aged). There is no cost to undertake the program (apart from the cost of some resources) and the program is offered each semester – both as a full-time or part-time activity.

There are ten courses offered across the disciplines as well a core subject known as 'Academic Skills for Success'. Three courses are required for transition to an undergraduate program. Students currently enrolled in university degree programs are also able to enroll in the TPP course, as students identified as struggling with coursework or failing units. Half of the TPP cohort are school leavers while the other half are mature-aged students (mainly female).

**THE TERTIARY PREPARATION PATHWAY (TPP) EQUIPS YOU WITH THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE STUDIES. TPP PROVIDES A PATHWAY TO A DEGREE PROGRAM.**

http://www.usc.edu.au/study/courses-and-programs/tertiary-preparation-pathway-tpp

## Reflecting on good practice

TPP's success is widely acknowledged in the community and therefore to-date there has been little need for it to be actively promoted, however, local schools are encouraged to send their students to the campus via the promotion of various regular activities (like Science Week). Much of the interest in TPP, therefore, is via 'word-of-mouth':

> *It is the positive stories that students leave with that seem to really encourage the next cohort and the future cohort*

> *(TPP Coordinator)*

Feedback from the students about their course is gathered regularly via various methods (face-to-face, written comments, using GoSoapBox in classes and lectures, as well as institutional surveys) and this feedback is shared amongst staff to help inform subsequent curriculum design. Reports from continuing students and academics in the undergraduate programs often speak of the engaged attitude and the sense of confidence in the academic system that students exhibit. The student-centred approach in TPP means that concerns and queries are answered as quickly and positively as possible during the program:

> *It's all about getting to know your students – if you get to know them really quickly and you get to provide them with these forums for them to have those conversations, you know, I think that just gives them a level of respect especially when you actually feedback, you've heard, you've listened.*

> *(TPP Coordinator)*

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[1] Overall Position (OP) is a student's position in a state-wide rank order based on their overall achievement in Authority subjects. It indicates how well a student has done in comparison to all other OP-eligible students in Queensland and is used for tertiary entrance purposes only. Students are placed in one of 25 OP bands from OP1 (highest) to OP25 (lowest). Other states use the Australian Tertiary Admission Index (ATAR) which is the primary criterion for entry into most undergraduate-entry university programs in Australia.
http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/630.html

## Applying the practical advice from the LSES resources

The digital narratives shown during the workshop had a significant impact in terms of thinking more conceptually about student engagement. Use of technology in the lectures to help the students reflect on their own experiences during the lecture has proved affective – as an example, a course dedicated to computer literacy asks students to record what they understand to be computer literacy and engage with the technology itself to provide feedback continuously throughout the semester. The students also use, for example, a word cloud application known as 'AnswerGarden' whereby they enter their responses using an iPad in lectures and get an immediate response. This feedback helps to develop resources for future lectures and workshops. Students then have the opportunity to reflect on what their experience has been during the unit

> *They have seen the power of the technology – which is part of computer literacy, digital literacy – they have also seen that their story is valued and have also been able to see that other people's stories are valued and that they become kind of co-creators of the material … they really feel part of the program.*

> *(TPP Coordinator)*

## Looking forward:

The workshop activities and resources will continue to be discussed amongst the TPP team and there is some interest in a type of student readiness survey as a possible resource, as well as the continued development of digital narratives.

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 #3:  Make expectations clear, using accessible language**

**Advice #4:  Scaffold your students' learning**

**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 #2:  Promote engagement with, and support from, others**

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

## More information:
**Program website:  http://www.usc.edu.au/study/courses-and-programs/tertiary-preparation-pathway-tpp**