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Focus the culture, policy and curriculum on engaging students

Influences on these practices

The two practices described in this statement highlight how structural influences such as university culture, policies, curriculum, assessment and discipline activities (Kahu, 2014)¹ shape the student experience. Both practices are drawn from institutional case studies at different regional universities that demonstrated impact in these areas – the first at whole-of-university level, shaping the university's culture, and the second at whole-of-program, influencing the first year of a course of study.

Good Practices at Regional Universities

These practices show how aspects of a university's culture, policies, curriculum and disciplines positively influence student engagement.



University of New England (UNE) Case study theme: Citizenship and graduate attributes enrich the student experience

Good practice 1.1

Institutionalise adaptable extra curricular programs to inspire students to engage with their communities as part of their learning

The New England Award (NEA) program is designed to encourage, recognise and reward students' personal and professional development through participation in extra-curricular activity. It is open to all UNE students and is targeted at 'whole of person' development. The distinctive student-staff co-creation of the NEA fosters a community of learning, through which participants support each other and participate in the program's evolution.

The case study demonstrated that participating in the NEA positively impacted students' sense of belonging, sense of achievement, citizenship, participation, lifelong learning prospects and future work success.

The practices adopted by the NEA program encourage students to actively plan their personal development through selecting and sourcing appropriate activities, setting goals, recording their progress, and reflecting on their learning and development through non-academic activities. It brings together otherwise disparate activities to provide student learning and development opportunities within a coherent framework. The program is deliberately structured to enable each participant to achieve the program goals, while accommodating the opportunities and aspirations of the individual.

The fact that the New England Award really asks you to think about the activities you are doing and how that contributes to yourself as learner, and yourself as a person – it makes you analyse what you are doing.

(Student 2)

Students earn NEA points for demonstrated commitment and success in their activities, with all activities requiring independent confirmation of successful completion. Students develop an individualised plan of future activities, based on their aspirations and the opportunities available to them. They record their activities in the MyNEA portfolio, and submit confirmation from the activity provider (for distance students these are employers and community organisations in the students' own communities).

¹ Kahu, E.(2014). Increasing the emotional engagement of first year mature-aged distance students: Interest and belonging. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 5(2), 45-55



University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Case study theme: Embedded and scaffolded course design enhances students' online learning experiences

Good practice 1.2

Commit to whole-of-program, embedded approaches to enhancing digital literacy and fluency with online teaching and learning modes.

In the USQ nursing program, key academic skills and digital literacies are embedded in two core first year courses, Building Professional Nursing Attributes A (CMS1008, or CMS) and Building Professional Nursing Attributes B (MAT1008, or MAT), known within the university as CMS/MAT. These courses included the development of students' online, information and academic literacies, as well as their numeracy, learning and research skills. This embedded approach responded to identified mismatches between incoming students' academic skills and literacies, an unfamiliarity with the university's academic requirements and the poor efficacy of previous extra-curricular attempts to resolve these mismatches. The case study demonstrated that an institutional commitment to the practice of embedding these literacies within the formal curriculum, contextualised as part of discipline study, had a positive impact on students' learning,

achievement, well-being, belonging, self regulation and participation.

The two embedded and scaffolded courses assisted first year nursing students to become more conversant with the often unfamiliar and largely online regional university environment by supporting them as they engaged and mastered the literacies they encountered there, thus helping them to succeed in their studies. The online activities, forum postings and formative assessment, coupled with immediate tutor feedback, positively influenced students' engagement, including their sense of belonging, self-regulation and participation, which in turn improved the proximal consequences of their academic learning and achievement as well as their social well-being.

I love reading their reflections that say they've learnt a lot from this course, developed new skills, can see how they're relevant to the rest of their studies and can see how they're relevant to their future nursing careers. That's always delightful, as an educator, to see that you've done something right.

(CMS tutor)

An embedded approach, where students are learning discipline-specific knowledge as well as developing academic skills and literacies, broke down the students' perceived barriers to university, gave them confidence that they had the knowledge and skills to succeed, and built a cohort identity.