
Student Success

ISSN: 2205-0795

Volume 10, Issue 1, pp. 99-114

March 2019



Evaluating the student experience with enrolment assistance in an integrated student support service program at the University of Southern Queensland

Anbarasu Thangavelu, Helen Partridge, Kathy Carey, Carmel O'Sullivan and Naomi Lutvey
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia

Abstract

Interviews with students who accessed enrolment support were undertaken to explore reasons students utilised this service, and how integrated student support service models can impact on student transition, retention and success. Results indicate that students primarily required support with course enrolments because of the new environment they were studying in, not being accustomed to existing processes and a lack of confidence. In addition, along with the existing service model, the integration of enrolment support into the student support service model had a positive impact on the student experience and engagement. The implications of these findings for the tertiary education sector are considered in light of the increasing focus on student engagement and success.

Please cite this article as:

Thangavelu, A., Partridge, H., Carey, K., O'Sullivan, C., & Lutvey, N. (2019). Evaluating the student experience with enrolment assistance in an integrated student support service program at the University of Southern Queensland. *Student Success*, 10(1), 99-114. doi: 10.5204/ssj.v10i1.1121

This article has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *Student Success*. Please see the Editorial Policies under the 'About' section of the Journal website for further information.

Student Success: A journal exploring the experiences of students in tertiary education



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution. ISSN: 2205-0795

Introduction

Improving student success has been the focal point for tertiary institutions within the exceedingly competitive higher education market in Australia. To enhance student success, universities have attempted to address the varying needs of their student cohort by reviewing their existing model for service delivery and identifying important factors that impact on the success of both students and the tertiary organisation. Consequently, some institutions have adopted a strategy of using integrated student support service models to provide effective and efficient support to students. In addition, 'integrated student support' has increasingly been used to improve student engagement which has the potential to lead to a positive student experience (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Krause & Coates, 2008; Tinto, 2010). By keeping students engaged in their studies and learning environment through integrated support models, the student experience is enhanced which is important for student transition and retention (Kift, 2009). Student attrition is therefore a constant challenge and universities are exploring new ways of dealing with this issue and their approach to providing support. Within this higher education landscape, where attrition is a concern for institutions, regional universities are required to use a strategic approach that contributes to student success through a high standard of service delivery and may address a wide array of student needs, including student enrolment. In 2016, research was undertaken at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), a regional university in Queensland, Australia, to explore approaches for designing, developing and implementing an integrated student support service model. This research was part of a wider project on student success involving institutions that were part of the Regional Universities Network (RUN). Different projects were undertaken by each member institution. The aim of the project undertaken by USQ was to provide initial evidence from one regional

university in response to the following question: *How can Australian regional universities develop an integrated student support service model that is sustainable, accessible, relevant and will impact student success?*

To address this question, two interconnected qualitative case studies were implemented. The first case study focused on staff and students' experiences with the 'one stop shop' student support service point physically located in the institution's library at the Ipswich campus. The second case study explored the 'Enrolments Session' program with a focus on the student experience.

This paper reports on the 'Enrolments Session' case study by providing an evaluation of the experience of students who had participated in the program dedicated to assisting students with their course enrolment. As well, this program was implemented to assist students in their transition to university and to reduce student attrition through the delivery of support within an integrated service model. With the link between the student experience, engagement and attrition, the aims of our study were to:

- Understand the issue of student enrolment and course selection from a student's perspective;
- Evaluate the 'Enrolments Session' program and the existing integrated service model, and;
- Assess the impact of the program and integrated support services on student engagement and success.

To address the aims of our study, the 'Literature Review' section provides a context of integrated service models with a focus on the link between student engagement and attrition, and consideration of how support services can assist with retention. The subsequent section, 'The Project' provides a detailed overview and

background of the 'Enrolments Session' program, thus giving context to this paper. Methods and analytical approaches utilised for our study are also discussed to provide justification of the recruitment and interview methods and why thematic analysis was employed. The 'Findings' section explores each of the emergent themes in detail to provide a narrative of the student experience. The final section discusses the emergent themes in relation to student support, experience, and implications for tertiary institution in terms of student success. It is envisioned that our study will provide an insight for other tertiary institutions on the value of providing additional support services to specifically address a particular student need and how this can impact student attrition, engagement and success.

Literature Review

In terms of service delivery, different models for integrated student support exist, including a blended learning model (Einfalt & Turley, 2009; McWilliam & Allan, 2014) and a virtual commons model that harnesses the use of online technologies and complements blended learning (Coates, 2006; Herrington, 2006). Both of these models play an important role in the overall student learning experience. Another important and complementary integrated student support model is the co-location of support services at strategic locations to assist students. Often referred to as *One Stop Shops* or *One Stop Counters*, support staff such as information officers, information technicians, librarians and academic skills advisors are physically present and their services can be readily accessed by students to address their needs and assist with their learning experience at university (Kent & McLennan, 2007; Peacock & Meisell-Draper, 2008). To facilitate this, university libraries and learning spaces are often used as an integrated student support service point to merge various university support services. This is particularly important as students spend a considerable amount of

time in university libraries while on-campus (Delcore et al., 2009; Foster & Gibbons, 2007; Trowler, 2010). All three models of integrated student support are integral to the success of an institution as they focus on student engagement.

The concept of student engagement has been explored over an extended period by a number of scholars (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One current conception of student engagement is, as Trowler (2010) states:

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution. (p.3)

This definition highlights the important synergy between teaching and learning approaches, the circumstances of students, and the culture and structure of the education provider, which impacts on the success of student learning outcomes and the institution's reputation. Therefore, these factors need to be strategically considered by an institution when designing a service model that is engaging for students. In addition to enhancing student engagement, courses need to be integrated with collaborative support services which encompass academic, faculty, support and administrative programs (Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Kift, 2009; Kift, et al., 2010; Nelson & Kift, 2005; Tinto, 2006; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). This would allow for an institution wide approach to support students and increase student engagement.

In Australia, a number of institutions have explored approaches utilising integrated student support frameworks to increase student engagement and provide better service to students (Kift et al., 2010; Krause & Coates, 2008; Tinto, 2010). These universities include: University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland

University of Technology, Murdoch University, Victoria University, The University of Western Australia, University of Wollongong, The University of Newcastle, The University of New South Wales, Charles Sturt University, Edith Cowen University and Monash University. These universities have identified that student engagement is critical to their success and that service delivery addressing student needs has an integral role. In addition, an important element of student engagement is understanding the student experience and the retention of students. While a multitude of factors for student attrition have been identified (Long, Ferrier & Heagney, 2006), it is important to note the increasing student attrition rate in Australia. In 2006, student data from 32 of Australia's universities revealed a 10.5% attrition rate (Olsen & Spain, 2008). More recently, data from public universities shows an increase in attrition rate for new students (domestic or international), with the overall figure rising from 15.6% in 2009 to 18.7% in 2014 (Department of Education, 2015, as cited in Naylor, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2018). To address this, it has been suggested that by providing the relevant support service to meet a particular need, institutions may be able to successfully intervene to assist students, therefore reducing student attrition by addressing specific issues faced by students such as supporting those who may have selected the wrong course (Kift, 2009; Naylor & James, 2015; Naylor, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2018; Tinto, 2006). An integrated student support service model which addresses these issues through its service could potentially have a positive overall impact on student success, engagement and retention. Considering the correlation between course enrolment and student attrition, and the impact of an integrated service model on student engagement, a qualitative study of the 'Enrolments Session' program at USQ also provides an opportunity to examine these two inter-related issues relating to student success.

The Project

Overview of the 'Enrolments Session' program

The 'Enrolments Session' program was implemented as part of the Late Enrolments and Admissions Framework (LEAF) project, an internal review at USQ which focused on the impact of late admissions and enrolments on student attrition and success within the late student cohort (Parker, 2015). Analysis of the data from the LEAF project revealed an increasing trend with the late addition of courses for each semester, and student failure and dropout rates especially prevalent amongst domestic and on-campus students within the cohort of students who enrolled late. One of the key recommendations from the LEAF project was the need for more resourcing to support students who are enrolling late in their courses. As a result, additional support for students with their course enrolment was provided from 2016 onwards to address the recurring problem of late student enrolments and/or admissions with the aim of facilitating student transition (Carey, 2016).

Enrolment sessions were strategically placed at specific centralised locations on all three campuses where computers were available and other essential services were located as part of the existing integrated student support service model. Sessions were run from two weeks before the start of each semester to the end of week three. Support staff facilitated the sessions with each session operating during office hours. Enrolment sessions were promoted through several communication channels including social media, printouts, posters and student announcements with physical signs included to direct students to rooms where the sessions were run. Support staff in other departments such as the International Office or Student Administration also referred students to the service. The majority of students who attended the sessions

were starting their studies at USQ while a minimal number had previously accessed this support.

In terms of late enrolments, students would ideally be enrolled before the start of the semester to allow them sufficient time to prepare for their courses. However, some students were not able to enrol before the commencement of semester for various reasons and the enrolment sessions which were available during the first three weeks of the semester, assisted in addressing late course enrolments.

Initial data showed that these sessions were utilised by a large number of students during the first semester of implementation in 2016. An internal review demonstrated that the enrolment sessions were successful with a decrease in late student enrolments compared to the previous year (2015). As well, these sessions provided feedback to staff on how to manage student enquiries more effectively before the commencement of semester which is considered a busy period (Carey, 2016). The initial results suggest that enrolment processes have the potential to lead to a negative experience for students with implications for the institution in terms of failure and attrition. Therefore, analysis of the student experience with the enrolment process provided an opportunity to further explore this link.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used for this study. While there are various interview techniques, semi-structured interviews were conducted because of the pre-determined questions, and this method allowed the interviewer to examine the topic in greater depth and explore the student engagement experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The pre-determined interview questions, developed by the research team, were not only designed to gain an

understanding of a student's experience with enrolment support but to also explore students' experience at the institution in relation to the assistance received, challenges, benefits and limitations of current support services and how USQ could enhance their overall study experience. Questions were structured to initially ascertain reasons why students needed assistance with course enrolments. Subsequent questions focused on the student experience at the enrolment sessions which allowed for an evaluation of the support service. This was followed by questions that focused on the integrated support services at USQ to determine if the enrolment sessions and existing support services had a positive impact on the overall student experience. The structure of the interview questions allowed for an investigation that aligned with the three aims of our study.

Semi-structured interviews with students who had participated in the on-campus enrolment sessions in Semesters 1 and 2 in Toowoomba, 2016 were conducted for this study. Ethics approval was attained prior to the commencement of recruitment. A total of 29 students from the non-randomly selected sample comprising of 309 students, that is students who had specifically participated in the enrolment sessions throughout the year (Semester 1 = 141, Semester 2 = 168) were recruited for the interviews via email and telephone communication. Emails were sent to students during initial recruitment, however with a low response rate (two students), further participants were recruited via telephone contact which effectively increased the sample size to 29 students and provided a richer dataset. More international students participated in the interviews compared to domestic students with the average length of each interview being 17 minutes. Participants were also required to provide consent before each interview and were provided with a project information sheet. The researcher made participants aware of the project, the interview process and their right to withdraw without any

implications. Interviews were stored securely and then provided to a transcriber employed for this research. The transcriber was required to sign a confidentiality form and transcribed data was then analysed using NVivo 11 program.

Analysis

A thematic analysis using a grounded theory approach was utilised with the data coded to emergent themes. While a variety of methods can be used in qualitative research, thematic analysis was utilised for this study as this method can be applied to small datasets as well as cover a variety of research paradigms. This method is helpful in ascertaining and analysing important trends within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013, 2017). As pointed out by Clarke and Braun (2017), it is also a flexible method “in terms of research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation” (p.297). Therefore, by employing thematic analysis, our aim was to ascertain broader themes within the data beyond the evaluation of the program and to explore the student experience and engagement with existing support services and how these might impact on student satisfaction.

Findings

Four main themes with certain correlations and trends within the data were identified following the analysis of the transcriptions. The main themes are:

1. Adaptation and learning
2. Student enrolment experience
3. Identifying student needs
4. Enhancing student success – flexibility, integration and awareness.

In addition, the three aims of our study are addressed by the following themes:

- Understand the issue of student enrolments and course selection from a

student’s perspective - Theme: adaptation and learning.

- Evaluate the ‘Enrolments Session’ program and the existing integrated service model – Theme: student enrolment experience.
- Access the impact of the program and integrated support services on student engagement and success – Themes: identifying student needs; enhancing student success –flexibility, integration and awareness.

Several sub-themes are present in each main theme, which demonstrates the diversity of student experiences. However, for the purposes of this paper, each theme has been summarised with only selective quotes used. Direct quotes are used throughout this section to explore each theme. In order to ensure confidentiality, each quote is given a participant number.

Adaptation and learning

As course enrolments, or specifically selection of wrong courses, has been identified as a contributing factor to student attrition, it is important that the reasons students were seeking assistance with enrolments are identified. Participants highlighted various factors that impacted on their attempt to enrol in courses. These factors included language barriers, introduction to a new study environment, new and different processes associated with enrolments in Australia, flexibility and confusion around course selection, arriving late at USQ, lack of competency with the use of technology, emergence of technical issues, lack of success in navigating the USQ website, and feeling uncertain about the enrolment process. Amongst these reasons, certain factors featured more prominently than others and were more applicable to international students. Nonetheless, these factors highlight that the majority of students who were new to USQ were still adapting to the new environment, processes and systems. Adapting to a new study

environment and its processes and protocols was particularly evident with international students as this new experience was vastly different from their previous experience. One student mentioned:

Yeah, in India, we went to the universities and we know what we have to do. But here it's totally different. We have come to the new country, new place, then totally the education is quite different to India, so we feel difficulty. (P19)

The new study environment also meant a major difference with the processes involved in course enrolments in the new education system and this was evident especially with participants from India where students were not allowed to choose the preferred courses they wished to study in a semester:

In our college, there is no selection of enrolments [courses]. They will only say, "These classes are there. These subjects are there. We have already enrolled you." We have to pay the fee and we have to write the exam. There is no enrolment session in my [college]. (P8)

Therefore, these students were still adapting to their new institution. To add to the complexity, a self-directed online enrolment system was not utilised in their home country and the enrolment process was completed in writing:

Yes, I think over there the system was just like a kind of written thing. There's nothing like online. You have to do things in written and over there they will provide you with the recommended pattern with themselves, they will not tell you what you're going to choose. So, it's just like they have provided you with some default programs and you have to follow it. You don't have any authority to change that ... (P10)

This barrier was not exclusive to students from India as certain universities in China utilise a similar approach to enrolments:

Yeah, for new students, the university system in Australia is a bit different from China. We don't need to enrol in the course by ourselves, we just need to know who is the monitor of our class and go to the class directly. They have already planned the class. So when I arrived at [institution name], I didn't know how to choose the course and I asked somebody who works here, like, maybe a student relationship office[r]... (P2)

These differences highlight that the flexible offering of courses at USQ and the autonomy for students to choose their own courses may be beneficial for certain international students and difficult for others who were still learning to adapt and understand how to go about their enrolments:

In my previous university, there wasn't much option. Over here, we've got options - like we can choose from our own wish, which course you want to at this time, which is easy, which you will find easy or whether you want to do a more difficult one ... (P4)

Hard to choose, hard to choose which subjects I will be take. And then after, when I came here, when I arrive here, then after I had to settle... I had to choose subjects. (P27)

This suggests that these students were lacking in confidence to independently resolve their enrolment issues.

In addition, certain international students found language to be a barrier as it impacted on their communication with staff. However, this was not considered as significant as it may have been assumed they may become more accustomed to communicating effectively over time. Other factors which were only highlighted by a few international students were arriving late for the semester and ensuring that course enrolments met student visa conditions.

It is important to note that a factor such as studying in a new environment was also an issue for certain domestic students. For example, as students are expected to be more

independent at tertiary level, students transitioning straight from high-school also experienced issues associated with adapting to the new study environment:

... I required assistance because I had just come out of high-school and I had an idea what I was doing and my mother is not from Australia, so she's never been through the system either ... (P7)

In line with the theme, certain participants among both domestic and international students lacked the necessary technical and digital literacy skills that was needed to self-enrol in courses which points to a process of learning:

Okay, I have a lot of problems with my computer at home. These problems arise from the fact that I'm not in complete control of my computer. I made a couple of aborted attempts to enrol from home using my own computer... and they were not successful ... (P25)

This also included a problem with the inability to adapt to the Student Centre enrolment interface effectively, which participants reported as not being user-friendly:

No, it's actually just 'cause I don't know how to, I find the interface for enrolments very confusing at the moment. I mean there's like "add", "drop", "modify" all this stuff and I'll be sitting at home trying to get a course just added and I'll be clicking through all these menus and one of them will take me back to the start and I just kind of give up on the whole thing and I figure I'll just come in, I'll tell someone what courses I want to do. I know how to modify the courses once they're in my enrolment, so I can pick a class and stuff, but I don't know how to just get the classes that I want. (P23)

While some students were technically competent, they still faced technical difficulties which meant that they required assistance from support staff:

I had trouble enrolling in one of my classes. It just wouldn't join me for some reason, so I went down there and they helped me to enrol in that particular class. (P13)

... for semester two I think I needed enrolment assistance because, I think there was a clash with my classes. (P5)

For new students, navigating the institution's website and accessing the required information relevant to their program of study was an issue as they were still getting used to the website.

A common issue which emerged for many participants was uncertainty and lack of confidence in completing the task which can be linked to these students still adapting and learning about what actions were required of them. This was primarily due to the new tertiary environment the students were part of and them not being accustomed to existing processes and procedures:

... I looked at everything but I'm not sure. Like, the pattern is not clear which and how to take it in the correct order, you know. (P15)

Yeah, I think my mum and myself felt a bit like we had just clicked a couple buttons that looked right but we weren't sure if I had even actually enrolled yet. So wanted to see if we had done it right, make sure that we were enrolled and everything ... (P7)

Regardless of the varying reasons, it was clear that many students were new to the university and completing the course enrolment process was challenging for them. In particular, they were still adapting and learning how their new environment functioned.

Student enrolment experience

While the issues faced by students with their enrolments identifies certain needs, their experience of the enrolment sessions needs to be taken into consideration in order to evaluate the program to make further improvements and

to access the impact of an integrated student service on student engagement. Participants were asked questions relating to promotion of service, access, quality of support from staff and extent to which support was provided, and the overall effectiveness of the service.

Awareness of the service is important as students may not access the service if they were not informed of its existence. Participants were alerted to the service through various sources such as USQ's website, university departments, service points, emails, posters, information booklets, pamphlets or recommendations from friends, which was effective in attracting students to this service:

I got an e-mail for my registered e-mail address - this is the enrolment sessions happening in the university and all this stuff like that. I went all through that and, you know, after going through that I had some questions for that. So, to clarify those questions, I've been here to the enrolment sessions all the time. (P14)

Yeah, yeah, so there was posters and also I got a little booklet that had all the times for every orientation session that was on campus. (P7)

.... I had friends who were staying with me, and I met them, so they just took me here. They just brought me here. They were informed to come to this enrolment session and they brought me here. (P1)

The international office. They told me to go to our [R] block. (P19)

Participants highlighted that they accessed the service during the advertised times and the provision of this service in a centralised location amongst existing services was beneficial as it made it easier to access support with directions provided by staff and the display of promotional material:

I seen that orientation week symbols are there. I seen those, like there's a hint. I came to here and I saw that two main computers

are there and SROs [Student Relationship Officers] are there. (P8)

In addition, by locating the service at a centralised location, students would have gained an awareness of other existing support services. Given the various issues experienced by students, each participant attended an enrolment session with specific individual needs which were addressed by support staff. Students received assistance to understand the enrolment structure for their program of study, choosing the correct courses, procedure for adding courses using the Student Centre interface, and addressing other enrolment issues such as access or clashes between courses:

They go through my program enrolment structure and they told me that all these courses would be helpful for you because most of the people enrolling in those courses. Through that, I enrolled on those courses and it was helpful for me while studying to go to group studies with my friends. (P11)

Um, they just basically showed me how I can add my subjects and everything like that, and they helped me through it and explained to me and everything, and I understood better after that. (P29)

Yeah. I have asking them that I am not getting access to my enrolling my subject and they have call to the higher authorities - I don't know whom they have called - and they have found the problem and they have said "Now you can enrol your subjects. (P19)

When they helped me to select my courses, they will help me to choose the time which I want to attend to the class. And at first, some of the courses they clashed, so they helped me to adjust the time and, yeah, that is what I can't finish by myself. (P2)

In evaluating the enrolment sessions, most students were appreciative of the service provided as it addressed their needs and

assisted in alleviating an important concern, thus leading to a positive experience.

Similarly, for international students, this service was very valuable as similar support was not provided in their home country, therefore highlighting the importance of recognising a need and providing an integrated support service to address that need. Importantly, the enrolment sessions had a positive impact on students as it allowed them to adapt, learn and gain confidence with this process:

Yeah, no, easy - no problem. It was very easy. Everything I learned from people in first semester I was able to retain and do again. (P3)

Yeah, I feel more confident now, and I feel I can do it by myself without anybody's help, so it has improved a lot. It has helped me a lot. (P29)

Participation in the enrolment sessions also highlights the willingness of students to engage with support services.

However, certain participants did highlight issues with the service and felt that improvements could be made. A common issue for some students was that the sessions were busy and that they were either not able to receive the necessary support or staff were not able to spend sufficient time with them. This is an important point as support services need to be well planned and staffed in order for students to engage with a service. Therefore, it was suggested that more sessions be made available:

And so I came on a Friday to enrol with the assistance up here. Unfortunately, it was a very crowded classroom at the time, very crowded on a Friday – on that Friday – and I was not able to get [assistance]... I started, as I said, met some barrier and could not complete it. I couldn't get assistance ... so that was another aborted attempt at actually the enrolment room. (P25)

There were two people helping and there must have been... every computer in the room and more I think, was occupied by a student. So maybe on days where you expect it to be busy, like the Friday of an orientation week, you could have a third person available. (P25)

Another issue was the operating hours which needed to be extended to make it more flexible for students:

Yeah, but the management should look, they are really coming for the international students, they should prolong the time. In this enrolling period, some think they should prolong the time or keep in more staff and work 'til 5:00 or 5:30. That will help a lot of students. (P20)

Some international students discussed the benefits of having staff of the same nationality or someone who had prior knowledge of their program of study to assist them with their transition:

...like, you know, they may not be available because they're not specifically consigned to your course. That was one of the situations on my turn. He was like doing agriculture or something like that and the guys for the enrolment are not pretty sure about the courses. And they were really after someone other for getting to inform that person. (P14)

While other minor suggestions were provided, the overall evaluation of enrolment support was positive with feedback providing an opportunity to improve the service. The experience of students provides a valuable insight into the perception around enrolment processes from the student's perspective. It also demonstrates how specific support programs can alleviate concerns amongst students and raise awareness of available services which students are likely to engage with while leading to a positive experience.

Identifying student needs

Discussion of needs surrounding enrolments provided an opportunity to identify other student needs in relation to gaps in the current integrated student support service model. This allows for refinement and identification of existing services which students engage with. While most students did not highlight any gaps, certain participants felt that there was need for further support with the transition to university study, peer support, academic and study skills support, and promotion of existing services:

Yes, what I can do if any new students are coming in, you can call previous students to have a party or free something, so that we can get familiar to the students who are coming here, and we can make them understand what you need to do, how you go online, how you get familiar with the study desk, how you do things to get a pass. So yes, that would really help the new students to get familiar with the stuff. (P10)

So like, I feel like, you know, most of the people coming from overseas are not aware of plagiarism and all this stuff, because I feel it very strictly because we haven't got assignments and all this stuff, to do there. We've just got an exam, sitting an exam, right? Write the exam, that's it. But here, it's entirely different. Like, they ask for the assignments and all this stuff. It's pretty difficult for any newcomer to get adjusted to that situation. And most of the people don't do it directly, but they end up with effective plagiarism. So I feel like there should be some sessions where you can back refer, you know, making people available for plagiarism and what would be the consequences of that and all this stuff like that. (P14)

Yes. Because I know there is all the information in the website, but we don't read everything on the website. But so even I check everything in the website, but when I go to see the student services and the staff explain me, then I can understand much better. But most students, they just don't go

there, and they don't... didn't know until they get the problem. (P24)

While these areas were identified as gaps by certain students, services such as peer support and academic and study skills support are currently available and have been promoted to students. Other university services have also been actively promoted to students but a lack of awareness among certain students was apparent which is an issue in terms of student engagement.

In contrast, students who were aware of existing services provided constructive feedback to make further improvements. This included the need to make improvements to USQ's website and the Student Centre interface:

I meant the USQ websites. A lot of information, I don't know how to get at, and there are a lot of useful information to me. If they taught me about that, at first, that will be perfect so I can quickly know more information in USQ... (P2)

... probably just the interfaces on the website. Like a few times I found it hard to, or I found that there seemed to be like more steps than are necessary to get the information that I need, especially with the student centre – like the way you log in and then there's that drop down list for like grades or exam timetable and then you have to click through other stuff, or if you want a transcript. Yeah, I don't know how it could be improved but I found that a little bit – it seems more complicated than ... (P23)

Other comments were provided on extending the service hours of the Library, and improved access and availability of support services to accommodate more students during peak periods of the semester. All of the responses clearly highlight the importance for tertiary institutions continually reviewing existing services and how a failure to address particular student needs may impact on student satisfaction and engagement.

Enhancing student success - flexibility, integration and awareness

Student engagement represents an important aspect of student and organisational success. Support services are integral to student engagement and need to be integrated, flexible, and visible to students. As evident with the 'Enrolments Session' program, providing additional services can lead to an increase in student engagement.

Participants in this study pointed out that the design and delivery of existing support services were highly beneficial and flexible in assisting with their studies, especially the centralised and integrated service model. Students often engaged with various services offered within this model:

Yeah, 'cause it's nice for everything sort of in the one spot. So if you have a problem, that's just where you have to go, so you don't have to figure out where you have to go. If you have a certain problem you have to go one place and if you have certain other problem you have to figure out another place. (P13)

I think they provide us, they provides us everything, even with internet and library and, 'cause the library's open 24 hours, the library downstairs, so that's, like if we need to print something or, 'cause all in one campus, that's really convenient for me. (P5)

The example is that there are many departments. Not one single department is not handling the many departments. In fact, any official you see walking around, you ask for help, they will help you. They helped me. Nobody has said no to me so far, but in the place where I am from, it wasn't like that. They just sent us to the particular department which was mostly crowded, so that was poor and [institution name] is better...They do offer support, but the support at [institution name] is much higher than that. (P4)

However, when asked about their needs and how to improve the existing integrated service model, students again pointed out the need to provide and promote academic support services to assist with transition to university study:

Actually, it's very different. The teaching here is very different from what I have back home. A lot of assignments. It's not there back home. We just have exams. So it's different, and for me, and for others who come here for the first time, it is a bit difficult. We come across subjects we've never studied before, and then we have to do assignments, like, difficult assignments on those subjects. It's a little difficult because we don't have the basics. (P1)

This is an important point in terms of student engagement as those who had accessed academic skills support spoke about the positive impact it had on their studies:

... the main support was in the orientation week - what to do, how to get successful, how to do assignments, the references is the main part. There are so many lectures that's organised by the university. Those references in all of them was the weakest part of my ... and those lectures helped me a lot. There are too many, I can't count them. (P4)

According to participants, other improvements that could be made to the existing service model might include the integration of post-study transition support and the provision of more services to help international students with their transition to studies in Australia. Overall, integrated service models which are flexible and well promoted have the potential to contribute to student satisfaction, engagement and success. Access to these services assist students to adapt to the new institution and feel engaged in their learning experience.

Discussion

A major aim of this study was to explore how inclusion of a support service to address a specific student need within an integrated support service model can assist with student engagement and success. The experiences of students in accessing enrolment support and other services align with existing theories on the importance of addressing specific student needs, and how integrated service models can assist with improving student engagement and learning outcomes. It is important to note that the findings from this study are based on the experiences of a small sample of students and therefore may not necessarily apply to all students in the tertiary education sector.

Enrolment support

The qualitative data has identified reasons why students seek assistance with their enrolments and how it can impact on their studies. In particular, it is evident that students were lacking confidence in independently completing the self-directed enrolment process by using the available online enrolment system. While there are a number of reasons, seeking enrolment support can primarily be attributed to studying in a new environment and becoming familiar with the procedures and protocols. Students' perceptions and evaluations of the service clearly demonstrated the need for this type of support since it has the potential to have a positive impact on their experience by alleviating concerns and helping them to transition and focus on their university studies. In addition, this service has assisted students in developing self-confidence in completing this task. Furthermore, as the majority of participants are new to the institution, and have a specific need to attend to, the strategic placement of an important service creates an awareness of other essential services which has the potential for increased student engagement. Students also gained more satisfaction and confidence in the institution because of the

manner in which they are supported. Issues faced with enrolments, especially selecting the wrong course, can lead to a negative experience at university. It has been indicated in the literature that institutions should intervene to address specific student needs such as incorrect course selection to help reduce attrition (Kift, 2009; Naylor & James, 2015; Tinto, 2006). This study demonstrates that employing this early student support approach can lead to positive student experience with transition.

Integrated service models

Integrated student support service models play an important role in contributing to student and institutional success. This study reveals that service models need to be flexible and additional services should be included to address particular student needs. Students' perceptions of support services need to be taken into consideration when designing and implementing these services. While the evaluations of the enrolment support and existing services at USQ were generally positive, students have highlighted several concerns and offered suggestions to improve some services which cater to their diverse needs. To-date, certain changes have been implemented at USQ to improve enrolment sessions and other existing services. However, the important points raised by students reveals the need for an expansion of integrated service models to offer students further services to assist with their transition and studies. It is evident that new students experience a lack of certainty with their new environment and by providing additional services, students are likely to feel more comfortable and satisfied with the institution which may contribute to their overall success. Students in this study have discussed the benefits of the integrated service model, how it addresses a variety of needs, and the strategic placement of services, which suggests greater student engagement. This aligns with the idea that student engagement can be improved if courses are part of

collaborative support services which include academic, faculty, support and administrative programs (Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Kift, 2009; Kift et al., 2010; Nelson & Kift, 2005; Tinto, 2006; Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Implications for universities

In the competitive higher education landscape, universities need to constantly explore ways in which they can address particular student needs by identifying an issue and adopting appropriate strategies to address that issue. For example, enrolment specific support was integrated into the existing service model at USQ to address an important identified student need that could facilitate transition and help to reduce student failure and dropout rates. In addition, universities need to consider the common factors identified in this study that have contributed to issues faced by students with their course enrolments, in particular the recognition that the majority of students are still adapting to and learning about their new environment and its processes. The other issues experienced by students are also of significance as they can potentially lead to a negative student experience. For international students, there needs to be more emphasis placed on providing assistance with transition to university as most of the students in this study emphasised the differences in education systems in their home country and Australia, especially with administrative processes and academic study requirements. This is not exclusive to international students as domestic students may also experience difficulties with transition. By strategically addressing these issues and implementing new support services to address these needs, institutions can play an important part in contributing to student experience and engagement from a student support service context by assisting students with their transition and alleviating concerns, thus allowing students to focus on their education.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are its primary focus on on-campus students. Experiences of online students were not included since at the time of research, enrolment sessions were not offered to online students. Since then, this support is now provided to online students. As online students represent the majority of the USQ's student cohort, their experiences need to be taken into account to further improve existing service models and tailor these services to meet their needs. Moreover, since course enrolments, especially the selection of wrong courses, may be a contributing factor to student attrition, enrolment issues faced by online students need to be explored. Another limitation of this study is that support staff who assisted students were not part of this research and their experience may offer a different but useful perspective. This perspective is important as certain students may have been critical of the service and staff may have suggestions which can assist with delivering a more efficient service. These limitations need to be addressed in future research.

Conclusion

Evaluation of students' experience with enrolment specific support, provided as part of an integrated student support service model, has given valuable insights into student needs and engagement. This qualitative study has identified that while there are varying reasons for seeking enrolment support, adapting to the new study environment and its processes, and lack of confidence in completing the task are the most prevalent factors amongst students who need help with their enrolments. In addition, enrolment specific support is important and the integration of this support into an existing integrated service model has the potential to have a positive impact on the student experience. From a student's perspective, the provision of support services that address a particular need is not only valuable but also

increases their confidence in the institution's ability to cater to their needs, develops their skills and assists them in optimising their experience and improving learning success. Therefore, students are more likely to engage with support services as they have identified the benefits these services offer. For institutions, it is clear that universities need to continue to identify the needs of their student cohort and services need to be incorporated into existing integrated student support service models as these are integral to student engagement and success at an institution. In doing so, universities may be able to reduce attrition and enhance their reputation as institutions that support their students, not just academically, but in other facets that promote engagement and success through an exemplary integrated student support service model.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant from the Regional Universities Network (RUN) to the University of Southern Queensland.

References

- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Burnett, L., & Larmar, S. (2011). Improving the first year through an institution-wide approach: The role of first year advisors. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 2(1), 21–35. doi: 10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i1.40
- Carey, K. (2016). *Overview of specialised support resource model – Semester 1 2016 (Part of the Late Enrolments & Admissions Framework (LEAF) Project)*. Internal University of Southern Queensland Report: Unpublished.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Over-coming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123. Retrieved from <http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-26/edition-2/methods-teaching-thematic-analysis>
- Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 297–298, doi:10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613
- Coates, H. (2006). *Student engagement in campus-based and online education*. London, England: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Delcore, H. D., Mullooly, J., Scroggins, M., Arnold, K., Franco, E., & Gaspar, J. (2009). The library study at Fresno State. *Fresno CA: Institute of Public Anthropology*, Fresno, CA: California State University.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B.F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40, 314–321.
- Einfalt, J. T., & Turley, J. (2009). Engaging first year students in skill development: A three way collaborative model in action. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 3(2), A105–A116. Retrieved from <http://www.journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/index>
- Foster, N. F., & Gibbons, S. L. (2007). *Studying students: The undergraduate research project at the University of Rochester*. Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries.
- Herrington, J. (2006, October). *Authentic E-Learning in higher education: Design principles for authentic learning environments and tasks*. Paper presented at the In E-Learn: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. Retrieved from <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/5247/>
- Kent, P. G., & McLennan, B. (2007, December). *Developing a sustainable staffing model for the learning commons: The Victoria University experience*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Information and Learning Commons: Enhancing its Role in Academic Learning and Collaboration, Hong Kong.
- Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education. Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://transitionpedagogy.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Kift-Sally-ALTC-Senior-Fellowship-Report-Sep-092.pdf>
- Kift, S., Nelson, K., & Clarke, J. (2010). Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE – A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 1(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v1i1.13>
- Krause, K-L., & Coates, H. (2008). Students' engagement in first-year university. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(5), 493–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930701698892>
- Kuh, G. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College*

- Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0099
- Long, M., Ferrier, F., & Heagney, M. (2006). Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in their first year. Retrieved from <http://www.monash.edu/education/non-cms/centres/ceet/docs/2006stayplayorgiveitaway.pdf>
- McWilliams, R., & Allan, Q. (2014). Embedding academic literacy skills: Towards a best practice model. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 11(3). Retrieved from <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/>
- Naylor, R., & James, R. (2015). Systemic equity challenges: An overview of the role of Australian universities in student equity and social inclusion. In M. Shah, A. Bennett, & E. Southgate (Eds.), *Widening higher education participation: A global perspective*. Waltham, MA: Chandos Publishing.
- Naylor, R., Baik, B., & Arkoudis, S. (2018). Identifying attrition risk based on the first year experience. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(2), 328-342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1370438>
- Nelson, K., & Kift, S. (2005, July). *Beyond curriculum reform: Embedding the transition experience*. Paper presented at HERDSA 2005 Conference, Sydney. Retrieved from <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/3944/>
- Olsen, A., & Spain, J. (2008). *Staying the course: Retention and attrition in Australian universities*. Retrieved from <http://www.spre.com.au/download/AUIDFRetentionResultsFindings.pdf>
- Parker, R. (2015). *Late admission and enrolment project*. Internal University of Southern Queensland Report: Unpublished.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). How college affects students: A third decade of research (Vol. 2). Indianapolis, IN: Jossey-Bass
- Peacock, J., & Meisell-Draper, P. (2009, June/July). *Integrating learning services for integrated learning*. Paper presented at the 12th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference "Preparing for Tomorrow Today – The First Year Experience as Foundation", Townsville, Australia. Retrieved from http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers09/content/pdf/3E.pdf
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.2190%2F4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W>
- Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2006). Moving from theory to action: Building a model of institutional action for student success. *National Postsecondary Education Cooperative*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Tinto_Pusser_Report.pdf
- Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academy*. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview_1.pdf