FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE WORKING PARTY

The First Year Experience (FYE) Working Party has been established by the University Education Committee to improve the learning experience of all students in their first year of study at UOW, irrespective of their course, type or level of study.

The Working Party is investigating initiatives to better support the engagement of first year students in learning and the interconnected aspects of university life. It aims to facilitate the development, in the first year, of the skills and qualities that UOW students need to succeed at university, and beyond. By implementing a planned approach to personal, social, academic and professional transition, it hopes to assist students to develop a sense of purpose and engagement in learning.

In 2010, the FYE Working Party has organized:

- FYE Forums inviting experts from other universities
- FYE Think Tank for all at UOW involved in FYE activities
- Focus on FYE, a showcase for FYE Coordinators, planned for November.

Our objectives are to:

- establish a community of practice among first year coordinators, teachers and units supporting the FYE
- build awareness of the importance of the FYE in influencing retention, completions and overall course satisfaction of students
- strengthen the coordination of the first year experience across the University
- develop a holistic policy framework for first year student support.

The Working Party is mapping current FYE activities in faculties and divisions as well as developing recommendations for new activities. There are four FYE teams contributing to these recommendations by building work plans and checklists to be completed by the end of 2010:

1. Choices Team

   This team’s focus is on improving academic advice to assist clarity of career and course choice at the early transition points of outreach, offer, enrolment, and course changes. Its concerns are to ensure that consistent advice and support is available to students arriving via the multiple pathways for university and that there is clear communication and transparent expectations of what it means to be a university student.

2. Curriculum Team

   This team has two foci:
   - provision of academic support and orientation within the curriculum, especially within The First Weeks at UOW, in order that students develop a sense of belonging. A key concern is building early assessment and timely feedback into every undergraduate and postgraduate course to confirm students’ course choice and/or diagnosis of need for extra support.
   - design and mapping of curriculum and assessment around foundation academic skills and UOW Graduate Qualities such as communication skills and information skills as well as the responsibility of students to become independent learners.
3. Co-curricular Connections Team

The focus for this team is to introduce the academic, vocational and social fabric of university life by building explicit connections between curriculum, career aspirations and community involvement. They are looking at planned activities for students to develop a sense of belonging with peers, for example, in the same year, course, network, department, or faculty. A key concern for the team is that student engagement in co-curricular activities be recognised on student transcripts.

4. FYE Coordinators Checklist Team

The role of FYE Coordinators in universities is an emerging one and crucial to student retention and satisfaction. Based on examples from other universities, this team is developing a checklist for UOW FYE Coordinators to aid them in their work.

Meanwhile the FYE Working Party is developing a Transitions Framework, a pedagogical statement which positions our FYE focus in a broader context i.e. recognition of the multiple transition points in any students learning journey.

FYE’s work intersects with other strategic university projects such as the Student Charter, Social Inclusion Strategy, Student Experience Project, and Sessional Teachers Support.