First-Year Experience “Think Tank”

On Thursday 12th August, the UOW First-Year Experience (FYE) Working Party hosted a morning “Think Tank” event which drew 58 participants from across the UOW community, including all faculties, ASD, ARD, Careers Service, UniAdvice, WCA, URAC, and the Library. The “Think Tank” was structured to encourage participants to provide insights, experiences, and advice with the aim of capturing what we already do, or what we could improve, so as to provide a first-year experience that ensures our first year student cohorts are sufficiently familiar with what services are available to them and what is expected of them.

“Think Tank” participants were asked to consider the four themes of:

• “Choices” (what support do we offer in regard to ensuring students are pursuing the most appropriate degree/subject to fulfil their expectations, how can those services be improved, how do we ensure all students are aware of the services available to them);
• “Co-Curricular” (ensuring we capture and market to all students what extra-curricular activities are available to them at UOW, and how those activities will enhance their university experience and beyond);
• “Curriculum” (including initiating procedures to map how course curriculum provides students with all aspects of the UOW graduate attributes); and
• “1st year Coordinator check list” (a bench-marking exercise to initiate faculty-based check lists to ensure our first-year coordinators are equipped with, or have the resources available to them, to facilitate a positive first-year experience for students).

As can be seen from the photos taken at the event, all participants were put to work “brain storming” ideas and strategies for the future.

One of the “Think Tank” sessions involved a “Student Panel” where five UOW students, at various stages of their university degrees, presented stories of their own first year experience at UOW: two of the students had begun study at satellite campuses before moving to the main campus therefore their first-year experience had been two-fold; another student had deferred study by week 3 of her 2009 first-year, returning in 2010 with insight and fortitude to continue her degree; a student from China had come to UOW to pursue his doctoral research thereby experiencing a transition from full-time employment to returning to study, leaving his family behind in China, finding accommodation, and experiencing a steep learning curve with his command of the English language.

Following the “Think Tank” four themed working groups (as above) will continue to meet to deliberate on ideas already put forward and to refine strategies for improvement and implementation.

For further information on the UOW First-Year Experience Working Party, or if you are interested in hearing about further FYE activities, please contact June Aspley (june@uow.edu.au, or X4533).