

## European First Year Experience 2015

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# P27 – Facilitating whole-of-institution engagement in the first year experience through distributed leadership approaches

### PRESENTATION

**AUDITROIUM – WEDNESDAY 09:00-10:00**

Associate Professor Jo McKenzie, Dr Kathy Egea

Institute for Interactive Media and Learning, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Associate Professor Jo McKenzie is Director of the Institute for Interactive Media and Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has overall responsibility for learning and teaching development. She has 25 years experience in higher education and her research focuses on change in university teaching and learning.

Dr Kathy Egea is a senior lecturer with over 20 years experience in higher education. As UTS FYE coordinator, she co-leads the FYE strategy, building a FYE community of academic and professional staff in supporting first year students, facilitate small grants and leads the faculty-based FYE academic coordinator team.

### **Summary**

This paper describes a systematic, whole-of-institution strategy that uses distributed leadership to engage academics and professional staff in supporting transition, success and retention for first year students at an Australian university. A set of interrelated activities has achieved outcomes that include cross-institutional engagement and collaboration, student success and institutional recognition.

## Abstract

Distributed leadership involves collaboration around shared activities in which individuals are recognised for contributing diverse forms of expertise (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland 2012; Jones, Harvey and Lefoe 2014; Bolden, Petrov & Gosling 2008; Gronn 2000, 2002). Within higher education institutions, distributed leadership has been shown to be particularly successful in: facilitating alignment between top-down strategic directions and bottom-up emergent approaches and ensuring cross-disciplinary and cross-organisational collaboration (Bolden et al 2008); and engaging academic and professional staff in collaborative activities (Jones et al 2014). Distributed leadership approaches are thus highly appropriate for facilitating cultural change and engagement in strategic, institution-wide first year experience programs.

The First Year Experience (FYE) Strategy at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Australia, is an institution-wide, systematic strategy for supporting transition, retention and success for first year students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, within a philosophy that good practice for these students is good practice for all students. The strategy is guided by a framework based on third generation first year policy and practice (Kift, Nelson & Clarke 2010), which builds on Kift's Transition Pedagogies (2009), and is enacted through distributed leadership approaches. This paper will report on these distributed leadership approaches and their outcomes for the institution, staff and students.

Distributed leadership in the UTS FYE Strategy involves senior academic sponsorship, central coordination, First Year Transition Experience (FYTE) coordinators in each faculty, central and local learning communities and support for curriculum change at the local level. Implementation involves a set of interlinked activities:

- □ A university-wide FYE community with over 350 members, which engages academic and professional staff, enables sharing of resources and provides a sense of common purpose. The community has an online presence and email list.
- □ Five face-to-face FYE community forums are held each year to showcase good FY practice, share ideas and enable cross-university collaboration and networking.
- □ FYE communities of practice in four Faculties enable local sharing of practice and collaboration around local FY and transition priorities.

- □ FYE small grants (A\$500-A\$4000) support faculty subject coordinators to embed transition practice in the curriculum in ways aligned with institutional strategic priorities. Since 2011, 107 grants have been awarded, with 170 staff involved, including casual academics and professional staff.
- □ Resources to support subject teachers, including tutors, to implement transition pedagogies in practice.

Outcomes of the four years of the strategy for students have been evaluated using retention and success data from the institutional business intelligence system, along with further strategies in individual subjects. These outcomes include significant improvements in the success of students from low socio- economic backgrounds across the university and in specific subjects; and significant improvements in the success of those commencing with lower university entrance scores. Overall levels of commencing student success have increased significantly, despite a 38.7% increase in students since 2010. Outcomes for staff have included cross-institutional engagement and collaboration and evolution in understandings of transition pedagogies. The paper will present some of the diverse forms of evidence for these outcomes.

Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2008). *Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education*. London: University of Exeter.

Gronn, P. (2000). *Distributed Properties: A New Architecture for Leadership*. *Educational Management Administration Leadership*, 28(3), 317-338.

Gronn, P. (2002). *Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis*. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13,423–451.

Jones, S., Lefoe, G., Harvey, M., & Ryland, K. (2012). *Distributed leadership: A collaborative framework for academics, executive and professionals in higher education*. *Journal of Higher Education Professionals and Management*, 34(1), 67–78.

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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. Retrieved 10th October 2014 from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/33635/1/c33635.pdf>

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