

JUST-IN-TIME INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR FIRST YEAR BIOMEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The transition to university from either secondary school or the workforce can be a challenging one, with one-quarter of first year students considering withdrawing in their first year (James et al. 2010; Tinto 2012). The negative aspects related to student withdrawal are three fold, affecting the withdrawing students, the remaining students and the institution.

The Bachelor of Biomedical Sciences first year support initiatives began following an evaluation of the 2013 James Cook University Experience Survey (UES) data, which highlighted that a variety of reasons provided for considering early course withdraw were higher than the national average: particularly first in family (60% vs 48.3%), financial difficulties (37% vs 29%) and family responsibilities (23% vs 17%). JCU Biomedical students, like all first year students, struggle with the first year transition. This is compounded by 33% of them struggling with 'second-choice-syndrome' which is the disappointment of not being accepted into their first choice course. The professionally accredited courses of medicine, physiotherapy, pharmacy, nursing and dentistry are often their first choice courses.

Little information exists on the most effective means to disseminate just-in-time information or what just-in-time information is pertinent for the students as they progress through their university 'student lifecycle' (Lizzio 2011). Kift et al. (2010) suggests the transition pedagogy transcends the silos of academic and administrative support to a more holistic support for students. The challenge is to create a resource bank of pertinent support information and support contacts required at critical times early in the students' university transition. To date no such resource outline exists for Biomedical students in first, second or third year.

Our first year student support initiatives to disseminate just-in-time information included a bi-weekly newsletter (*MicroBytes*) and a monthly Biomed Freaky Friday (BFF) event. The BFF events provided an opportunity for students to network with peers, academic staff, JCU Student Support services, and external career and professional collaborators. The support initiatives have had considerable success in terms of positive feedback to date from students and academic staff.

The plan is to continue providing support while evaluating the success of these first year initiatives. While it is difficult to set key performance indicators/targets for extracurricular student support strategies such as these, we plan to monitor and document student perceptions, retention and overall engagement. We intend to extend these initiatives to continue student support through the difficult first to second year transition to avoid sophomore slump (Loughlin et al. 2013) and to assist third years with career preparation.

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