A partnership approach in and between disciplines to improve student engagement, belonging and retention.

RAISE conference 11 September 2014

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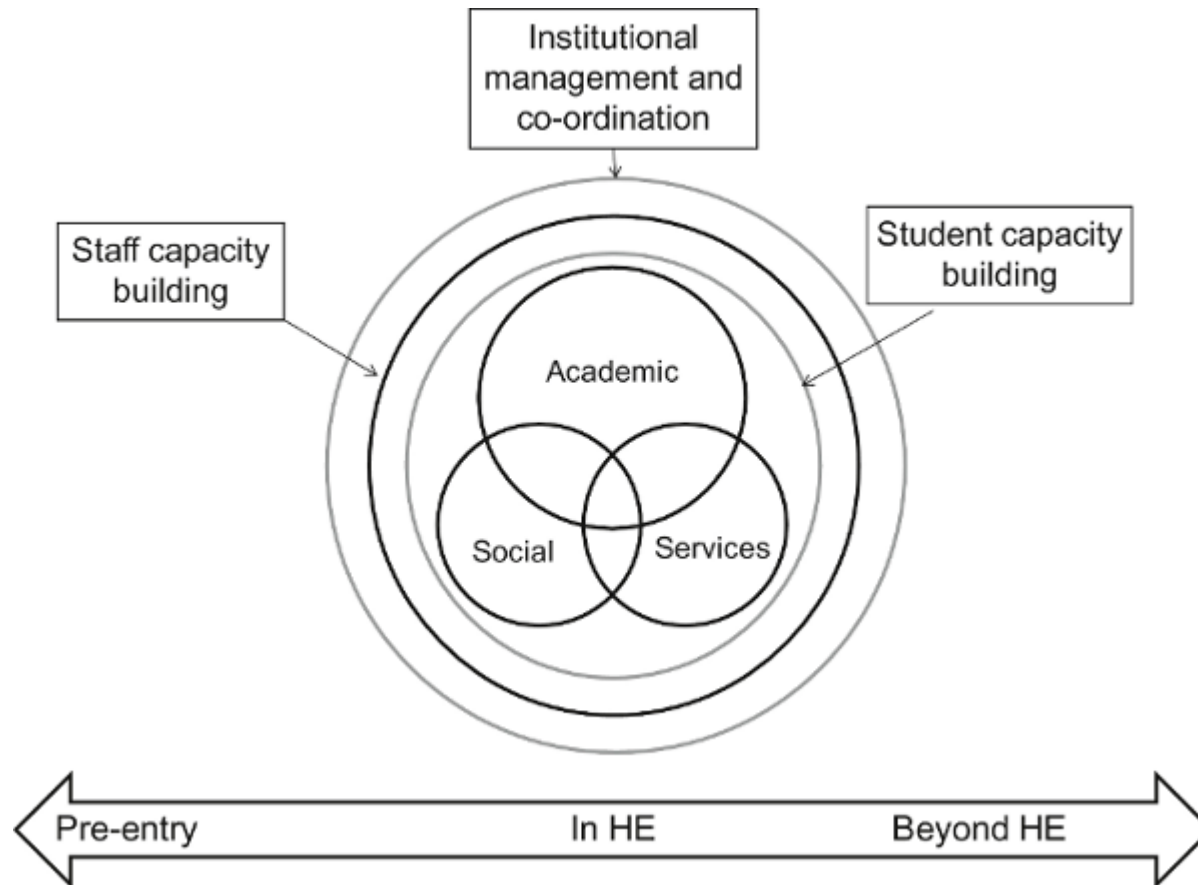r.curran@ulster.ac.uk

Introduction & Overview

- What works? change programme (2013-2016)
- Ulster Context
- Discipline areas: Law, Built Environment, Accounting, Computing, Nursing (Mental Health), Creative Technologies, Textile Art, Design and Fashion
- Areas of focus: Induction, Active Learning, Co-curricular activities

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The What Works? Model: improving student engagement, belonging, retention and success

(Thomas, 2012)

Institutional management and co-ordination

Staff capacity building

Student capacity building

Academic

Social   Services

Pre-entry   In HE   Beyond HE

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- 2011-12 At Ulster 8.7% (UK 5.7%) of students leave HE in their first year of study

- Between 37%-42% think about withdrawing (WW phase 1)
  - Range of reasons

- **Belonging** has emerged as a key idea in this research programme

- Engagement develops relationships with others and promotes connectedness…

Student Partners in Curriculum Enhancement (SPICE)
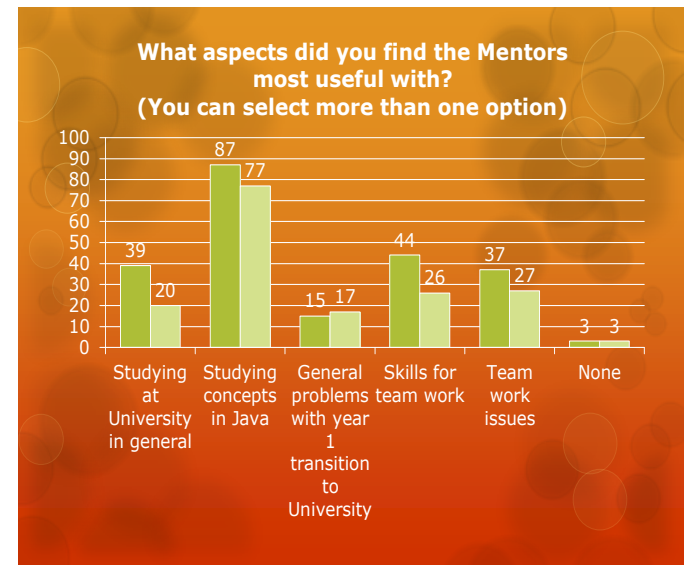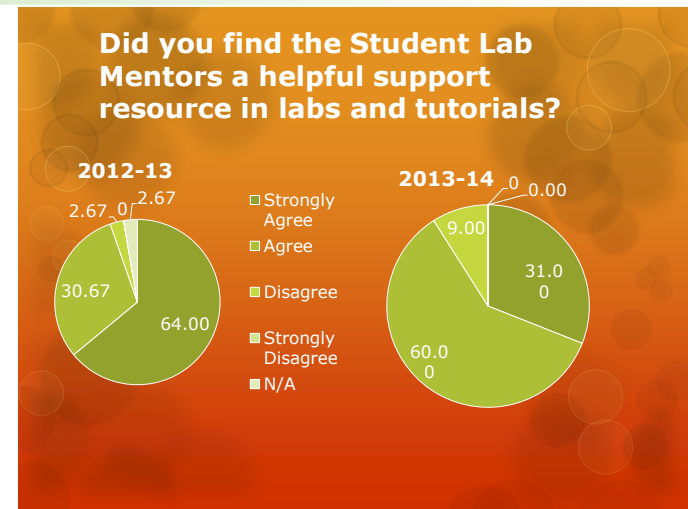
School of Computing & Information Engineering
Staff Partners: *Michaela M Black, Martin McKinney, Adrian Moore, Janet Allison*
Student Partners: *(PhD) Debbie Mitchell, Bua Siricharoen; (Final Year) Leslie Wilmot, Jamie Elliott;*
(First Year) Euan Cantley, Shannon Gough, Connor McMullan, Cormac OMaolin, Jamie Shields

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- Suggest Curriculum Enhancements
- Students Coaches Engaging Students
- Student Centred - Student Friendly
- Active Partners in Learning
- Student Coaches part of Community of Practice (CoP)
- Provide Formative Feedback to Student Teams

- Interview Coaches
- Provide Induction
- Provide & Facilitate Group Session Material
- Contribute as Team Coaches
- Collect & Review Student Feedback
- Facilitate Agreed Curriculum Enhancements

Did you find the Student Lab Mentors a helpful support resource in labs and tutorials?

2012-13
2.67 0 2.67
30.67
64.00

2013-14
0 0.00
9.00
31.00
60.00

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- N/A

What aspects did you find the Mentors most useful with?
(You can select more than one option)

	Studying at University in general	Studying concepts in Java	General problems with year 1 transition to University	Skills for team work	Team work issues	None
	39 / 20	87 / 77	15 / 17	44 / 26	37 / 27	3 / 3

They are a Confident Developer *– they have put themselves out there as being someone who is confident enough in their abilities to be able to help others and explain technical issues.*

They are a Confident Interviewer *– Being questioned by a first year who is trying to understand programming fundamentals is often what technical interviews are like! If I see an applicant has put themselves in this position with 1st or 2nd year students I know they are much more likely to perform well at technical interview!*

They are Doing Something Extra *– having this type of experience makes a CV stand out. The vast majority of graduate CV's are the same: everyone has either done a placement year and are doing a degree, very few CV's show that the candidate has had the motivation to do something that they wanted to do rather than something they were told to do.*

(Ruth Frizzell, Head of IT Recruitment, Wellington Recruitment Belfast)

Student reflections on last year's induction to LLB at the Magee and Jordanstown campuses

- 'If we knew back then what we all know now…'

- Pre-arrival task
- Induction activities

Pre-arrival activity

- Case study (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) sent out to new student intake after place had been confirmed
- Initial shock
- Promoted discussion and group work
- Students required to write a short essay on the case
- Key learning from this year to take forward…

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Need to grab students' attention – draw them in and create an interest from the start...

give out a shocking case study to read prior to arrival

- Smith v DPP [2006] where the cutting off of someone's hair amounted to the charge of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

- Re A (conjoined twins case) [2001] where a decision had to be made on whether to separate conjoined twins.

- R v Dudley and Stephens (1884) a case involving cannibalism whilst three men were shipwrecked.

- Ice breakers
- Class reps
- Groupings
  - Single honours law students and students studying law with a minor
- need to increase camaraderie

Conclusion

- As a split campus law course, many different induction techniques have been employed at both campuses.
  - Some have been very successful and some have been less successful.

- From the student perspective, it is our understanding that incorporating the more successful techniques from both Derry/Londonderry and Jordanstown in the inductions at both campuses, the overall induction experience will be improved.

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- Brunswick Movie-bowl.
  "One Stop entertainment centre" - it has a bar, fast food and nice restaurant, a place to go bowling, gaming machines and a cinema, something for everyone, great fun.

- Introduction night in the Students Union followed by a student led pub crawl of local pubs.

- Student led guided tour of the city walls of Derry/ Londonderry.
  "Good view of the city" - city walls go all the way around, which was a great way to get oriented with the city and see different view points.

- Student led tour of the University campus and Student Accommodation for those who will be staying in it.

- Group karting competition at 'Campsie Karting Centre', Derry.
  "Great Fun." - this is a brilliant place to go whether its for a party or just out with friends, it is great fun with very friendly and helpful staff. I would highly recommend.

A period of time (24 hours) that you are in close contact with the people in your university class but in a more relaxed and less daunting location.

Carry out a selection of team building activities. We should aim to have an activity to suit everybody but also continue to circulate the groups of people so you meet more new people in the short space of time.

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A chance to meet your lectures and study advisors in a less
formal way. This could help to build better relationships between staff and studen
For many, this could be the first time the student
will meet their study advisor, the earlier this can occur, the better.

24 hours of relaxed fun before the work begins.
This time could also be used to discuss the pre-arrival
case study with an open question and answer session.

3 programmes in the study:

Theme - Induction

- **BSc(Hons) Building Surveying**
- **BSc(Hons) Building Engineering & Materials**
- **BSc(Hons) Construction Engineering & Management**

Interventions:

1. Induction activities

- **'Short and sweet' with a focus on providing the key information and group activities**

2. Transition Module

- **'Building a Bridge' – key study skills, professional body, life skills for work, group activity and confidence building**

3. Attendance Monitoring

- **'Identifying problems' – early intervention, giving support and direction**

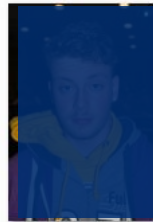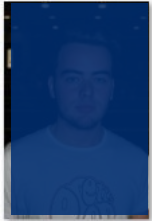University of **ULSTER**
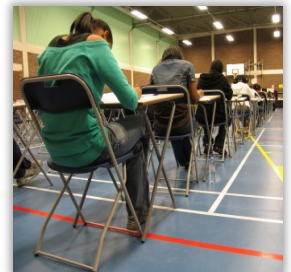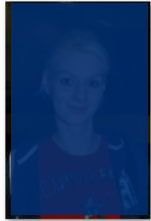
Interventions:

4. Study Support

- **'Safety net' – timely advice, sympathetic support, BlackBoard course support area. Nominated studies advisors.**

5. Peer Support

- **'Team Building' – on-going group activities, Student led Facebook groups. Active engagement with class reps.**
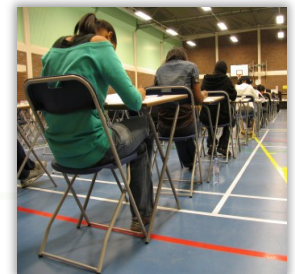
Outcomes: 82% Retention
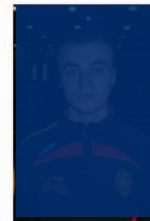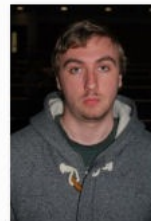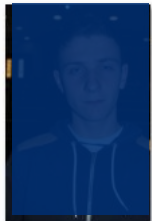
Higher levels of confidence in remaining cohort

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Outcomes:

Significantly improved student experience

– "we just feel sorry for those that don't engage and what they are missing out on"

Week 0 – Broadly welcomed by students

– "I would rather come in and do what we did rather than come straight into teaching in the first week"

Transition Module – 2 models used

- Improved student experience is driven by these module

– "Group challenges and public speaking really got everyone involved" and "We definitely should keep it"

- Semester 1 format appears more successful (than long thin model, as engagement reduced in semester 2)

Staff

- Key staff have a greater awareness of cohort cohesion
- Staff reflect and change teaching/integration strategies to maximise cohort cohesion
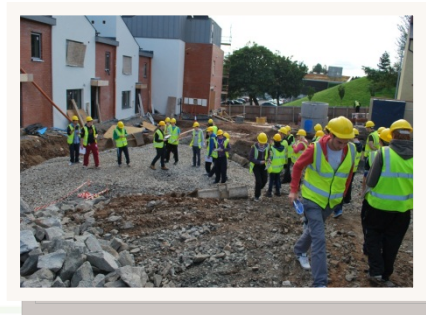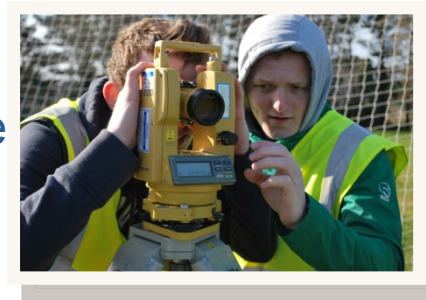
Next Steps:

Refine
- Picking up on the 'good stuff' - improving week zero
- Review and re-model transition modules

Add Value
- 'Nominated academic champions' mentors for first year course groups being rolled out this year
- pre-entry direct contact with new students
- Student engagement team led L&T coordinator
- Pro-active engagement with 'at risk' students

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- Qualitative research on the 'lived experiences' of staff student partnership
  - majority of staff and students are very positive about working in partnership to effect change
  - **Staff** report that their own approach to practice is changing
  - More open to the student body
  - Less likely to treat their students as a homogenous group
  - Becoming more reflective about their practice

- Qualitative research on the 'lived experiences' of staff student partnership
  - **Student** partners have reported that their perspective on HE is changing
  - They value the University involving them in tackling difficult issues
  - Enjoy problem-solving with staff
  - They feel that this approach is breaking down perceived barriers between staff and students
  - Learning new skills whilst developing their own self-confidence

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"I feel as I'm in more contact with the school, it would be harder for me not to finish my course. So, maybe that is exactly why we should be doing something like this – because I've even noticed a change in myself that I feel as if I'm definitely going to finish this and there are others who aren't in this kind of role and they are feeling a bit 50/50"

Quotes

"service based is one option but very clinical. It should be more educational, different from other sectors. It should be based on relationships and these should be developed. Some lecturers are very smart but not good at interpersonal skills. To be a successful lecturer, you don't just have to know your area; you need to be able to get your point across in a way that students understand it. You're wasting your time spooning out theory; students won't engage and won't remember it.

Quotes

"They see me more human and approachable. I see them in the same way… I know them individually and their capabilities and personalities a bit better… you can track their progress better and you can read more signs and stay tuned in to what's going on and spot the issues"

Quotes

"from a professional view point it works well for me, we are teaching our students to work in partnership with service users and it goes down to the idea of role modelling. There is a sense of letting go as well, somebody has labelled me as 'an expert' - ok I have more knowledge and experience but they are the experts in what they are experiencing as a student and I have a lot to learn as well "