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### Academic Preparedness (4P Model): A Framework for Delivering Student Academic Supports at Sheridan

Joan Sweeney-Marsh

*Sheridan College*, joan.sweeneymarsh@sheridancollege.ca

Danielle Palombi

*Sheridan College*, danielle.palombi@sheridancollege.ca

Marian Traynor

*Sheridan College*, marian.traynor@sheridancollege.ca

Kathleen Oakey

*Sheridan College*, kathleen.oakey@sheridancollege.ca

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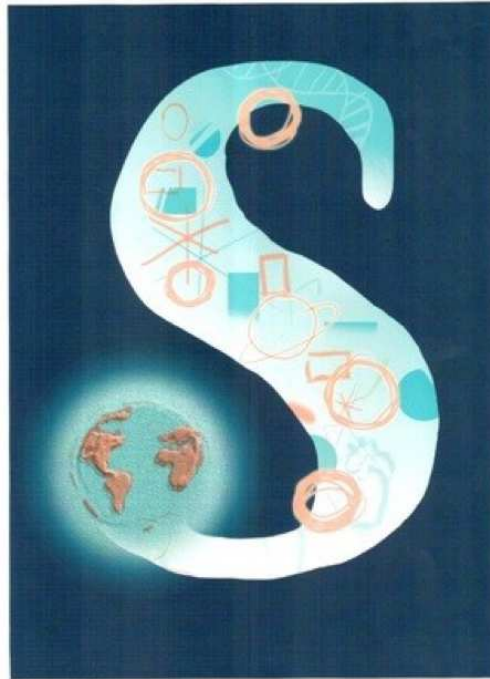
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Creativity Beyond Limits  
Anna Laura Gomez, 2015

# Academic Preparedness (4P Model)

A Framework for Delivering  
Student Academic Supports at Sheridan

Prepared by Joan Sweeney Marsh, Danielle Palombi and Marian Traynor

# Preface

In the Fall of 2019, I was asked to carry out research on how best to support International students' transition to Sheridan's learning environment and achieve academic success. With the help of Kathleen Oakey, FHASS Liaison Librarian, a literature review was completed and several International student support programs were identified across the sector. Information interviews were completed with specialists from both within Sheridan and across other institutions. The summary of this research can be found as an Appendix to this report: *Successful Models for Enhancing International Students' Academic Success: Research and Recommendations*.

*The Academic Preparedness 4P Model: A Framework for Delivering Student Academic Supports at Sheridan* grew out of the International student success research. It became increasingly clear that academic readiness planning should be defined by a set of skills that every student needs to possess in order to succeed in their studies. Helping students to acquire and develop essential academic skills at the right time is the focus of this report and at the heart of the 4P Model.

Joan Sweeney Marsh  
Associated Vice President, Integrated Learning Services



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# Academic Preparedness

Our research and proposal is guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean for students to be prepared for their academic studies and how do we know if they possess the necessary skills to succeed?
2. Can we use students' previous performance data or demographic indicators to predict how they might perform in college or from one academic year to the next?
3. How does previous learning experience impact future performance?
4. When is it the best time to intervene with academic supports and what interventions are most impactful in a student's journey toward their personal success?

Primary Research:

- conducted interviews with internal and external experts on academic supports
- reviewed published research on academic readiness (see bibliography and attached Report on International Transition)
- surveyed students, faculty and staff members on academic preparedness skills

Our findings inform a new academic support services framework, The 4P Model: Predictive, Proactive, Personal and Program-Aligned. Fuelled by technology and built upon universal design for learning principles, the 4P Model will help enable academic success for every Sheridan student. Additional Academic Transition Programming for high-risk populations will bolster students in need of extra assistance in adapting to their new learning environment.

## Connections to Sheridan 2024



**Priority 1:** Exceptional teaching, research and creativity.



**Priority 3:** Learner-centric student supports will enable people to access opportunities, make informed decisions and fulfil their individual potential.

**Empowering Enabler:** Facilitate an equitable learner-centric experience for all students with special attention to **international, first-generation and students with disabilities.**

**Five-Year Outcome:** Every Sheridan student will receive an accessible, individualized experience that enables them to maximize opportunities and achieve their potential.

# Academic Skills Survey

We asked faculty, students and staff for their insights to help develop a new academic preparedness model for delivering supports and services. By academic preparedness, we mean the combination of academic skills required to persist and thrive in one's program of study. Existing services include tutoring, academic integrity, foundational study skills programming, library citation and research services as well as English language learner academic support services. For complete survey results, please refer to Appendix A and Appendix B.

Those surveyed shared their opinions of what academic factors influence student academic success. They were encouraged to think of students in all years, not just in their first-year of study. The survey ran from Oct 14-Nov 27.

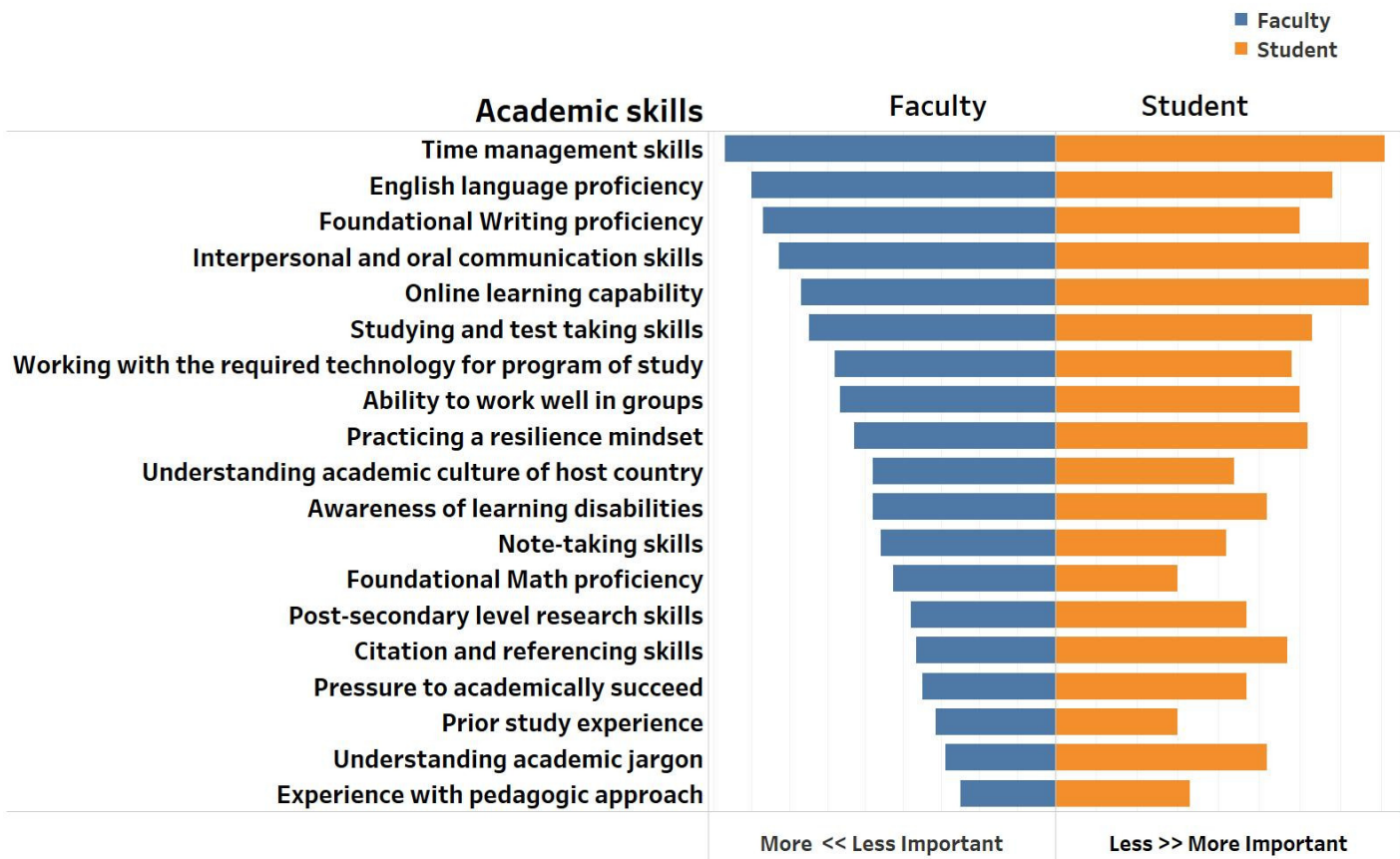
\***358** responses

\***257** of survey respondents identified as teaching faculty or an AD/Dean

\***60** of survey respondents identified as students

\*Data is further broken down by faculty in Appendix A and B

## Ranking of Skills



## 4P Model:

# Predictive...Proactive...Personalized...Program-Aligned

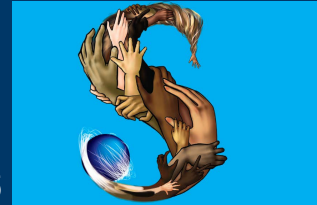
The 4P Model aligns faculty expertise with academic and career support services to develop and deliver data-informed, proactive and personalized assistance for Sheridan students from pre-arrival through to the completion of their studies.

## Predictive

- Use SEM personas to better understand incoming student populations and potential service needs
- Assess incoming performance data (e.g. GPA; language assessment scores) to identify at-risk students
- Identify Sheridan-specific high-risk clusters (e.g. international, first-generation, Indigenous)
- Make data-informed decisions to guide service delivery

## Proactive

- Map targeted early interventions to the first-year (e.g. proactive advising, Peer-Assisted Learning)
- Implement D2L Analytics to trigger real-time early alert interventions
- Develop a suite of intervention tools and services for teaching faculty to incorporate into courses scaffolded across the curriculum
- Embed high-demand and impactful resources into online learning environments and virtual communities (e.g. course-related Library resources, study aids, academic integrity and Learn Well modules)
- Develop acculturation strategies for first-year academic transition (e.g. programs for international students and mature students; translingualism strategies for English tutors)
- Align Well Series (Start Well, Transition Well, Learn Well, Work Well, Graduate Well) across Student journey



## Personalized

- Target supports to the individual needs of learners and personalize delivery whenever possible
- Implement incoming student self-assessment tool
- Ensure an equitable learner-centric experience for every student; apply universal design for learning (UDL) guiding principles to the overall design of services, tools and resources
- Align academic and career competencies to S-Sense learning records to inform individual skills development plans
- Adopt first-language-first approach in student academic and peer supports as required

## Program-Aligned

- Develop Academic program-aligned embedded support units (e.g. faculty stakeholders, tutors, librarians, Accessible Learning, career counsellors, learning strategists; Academic Transition Learning Manager, Early-Alert Data Specialists, Academic Skills Librarian, CTL liaisons) who provide coordinated learning assistance alongside academic and career advising
- Build virtual student support sites, ideally virtual simulation technology, by faculties, e.g. *FAAD Academic and Career LaunchPad*, which serve as a centralized online home for embedded and aligned assistance
- Create tools and resources for program-specific needs (e.g. English for engineers, arts-based assessment training, faculty/program-specific capstone readiness guides)
- Plan and promote events and experiences (online and in-person) that facilitate interaction between students, faculty and academic support services team members outside of the formal learning environment (e.g. exam crams, research and capstone project work, career fairs and industry days)



# Creating a Runway

## Additional Academic Transition Programming for High-Risk Populations

Widening participation backgrounds in post-secondary education sheds light on our commitment to helping students adapt to post-secondary education. Our own environmental scan showed that the focus on student support is frequently targeted toward international students and their transition to studies outside of their home countries. A particularly moving article on transition comes from Elspeth Jones (2017) on the topic of *Problematizing and Reimagining the Notion of 'International Student Experience'*. This page gives special attention to some of Jones' thinking; the research that informed our overall thinking can be found in the report's bibliography.

Jones explores the differences between the international and domestic student experiences and assesses the needs for distinct supports for the two populations. Jones concludes that the distinction made between domestic and international students is less significant than a student's prior learning and life experiences, regardless of nationality (2017). The position is further supported by other researchers in her article "this is echoed by Grimshaw who notes that disorientation can be experienced by any person who moves between one level of education and another (primary, secondary, pre-university, undergraduate, postgraduate, etc.)" (as cited in Jones 2017, p. 940). Jones adds that researcher Silvia Sovic also sees the need for broader transitioning support beyond international students "as numbers expand so does diversity, including 'mature' students, first in family to go to university, those with an indigenous heritage and so on. Domestic students from black and ethnic minority or working class backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities, have been found to face similar issues to international students on entering higher education (as cited in Jones, 2017, p. 935). Jones adds, "for example, a mature student entering a university within his or her own country may initially encounter HE as 'an alien space'" (Jones, 2017, p. 941). Finally, Jones argues that cultural differences and the educational backgrounds of many international students "would have benefited from a programme of acculturation into a new alternative academic approach" (Jones, 2017, p. 935).

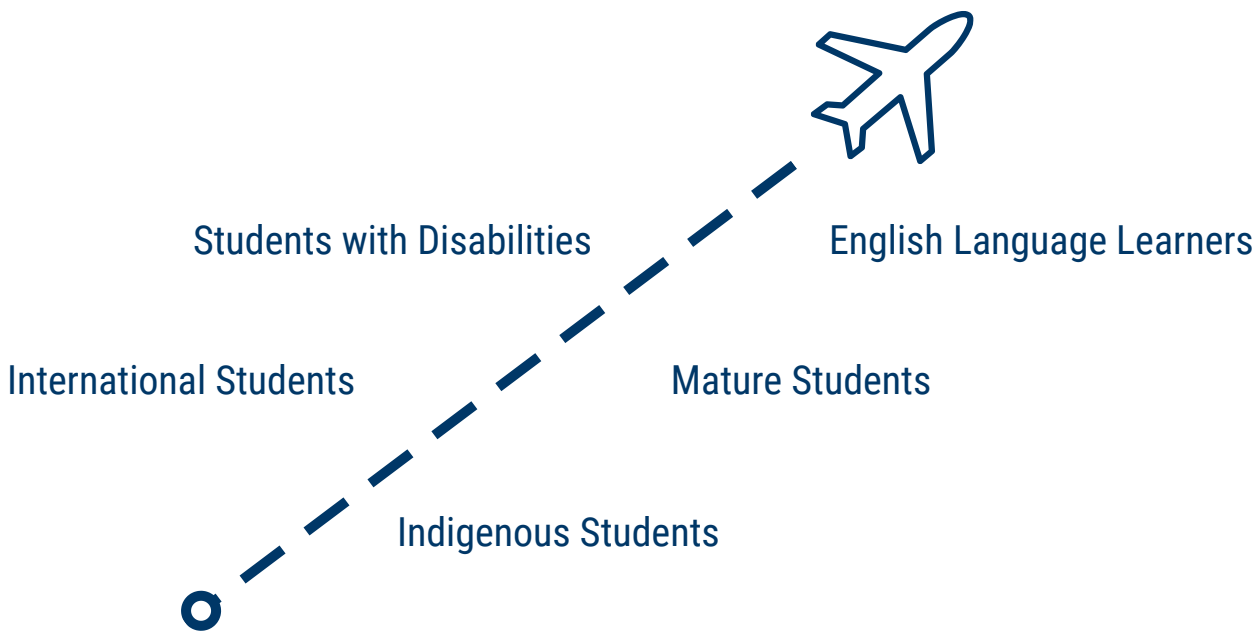
These research findings were confirmed in interviews carried out for this report with internal faculty and staff at Sheridan and external academic support specialists. In a conversation about incoming first-year International students with Mark Orlando, Associate Dean, School of Applied Computing, he astutely described it as the necessity to "create a runway" for these students. Similarly, Sheela Iyer, Professor & Program Coordinator, Sheridan Veterinary Technician Program, has come to the same conclusion.

Professor Iyer recently defended her Master of Education on the topic of Past Learning Experience of International students from India. "In my opinion, we need to understand both the learning systems/environments our students are coming from and the program-specific requirements/systems they are entering into to be able to set up supports that will help guide students, and possibly faculty, as well through this transition process." (S. Iyer, personal communication, March 17, 2020).

# Creating a Runway: The 4P Model

The 4P Model provides proactive assistance to all students transitioning to college. However, additional attention toward at-risk student populations is an important part of the academic support plan and will include learning technology training, academic and disciplined-based language orientation, ESL support and supplemental language instruction, cite and write aids, numeracy supports, research skills, etc. An Academic Transition Program Manager and the Academic Skills Librarian will also design accessible programming to help demystify students' new learning environment at Sheridan including accessible guidance on pedagogical approaches to teaching, course assessment methods and different modalities for instruction (e.g. in-class, hybrid and online). For English language learners, we adopt as needed a first-language first/multilingual approach to delivering services and resources (e.g. Academic Integrity modules in multiple languages; PAL tutoring support in a student's first language). As identified in the research, the provision of both discipline specific language (e.g. English for engineers) and academic jargon training will also help English language learners as they transition to post-secondary education at Sheridan.

Finally, the Academic Transition Program Manager, Academic Skills Librarian and other members of an academic and career readiness hub or "LaunchPad Team" will consult and exchange insights with teaching faculty and members of The Centre for Teaching and Learning in order to ensure ongoing impactful academic support services and to support curriculum and assessment design.



# Academic Preparedness Change Implementation Plan

This section of the report provides a change implementation plan for delivering an academic preparedness model for all students; the purpose of an academic preparedness model is to support student persistence, institutional retention and faculty seeking learning strategy skills to embed into their courses. Academic preparedness includes addressing literacy in English and Math as well as foundational success skills in time-management, note-taking, group work, mindset, study skills, test-taking and more. All students benefit from academic skills; Hepworth et al. write “the best predictor for student academic success is still ability and preparedness” (2018, p. 57). Sheridan is committed to providing equitable access to academic supports regardless of a student's social, cultural or economic background. Moreover, academic support is essential to our first-year students; Tinto (2012) writes “nothing is more important to student retention than academic support, especially during the critical first year of college, when student retention is still very responsive to institutional intervention” (p.25).

Together at Sheridan, we can:

- Improve the conditions for learning when students arrive to our institution
- Empower students with tools they need to succeed academically
- Equip students with transferable skills they benefit from such as communication skills, critical thinking, working with others and digital literacy (English et al., 2017)

The Change Path Model (CPM) by Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2016) is used for delivering the academic preparedness model's implementation plan. Each stage showcases short-term and long-term goals for review.

**CONNECTIONS TO RESEARCH.** Selected theories and frameworks are highlighted for guiding and informing the implementation of an academic preparedness model. The **transformative leadership** approach can be used as a lens to ensuring we serve all students regardless of social, economic or cultural background; finding ways to equalize opportunities and high quality education for all and promoting individual academic and intellectual growth (Shields, 2012). Tinto's **tenets for institutional action** (2012) encourages us to emphasize academic support in the classroom and in the first-year. **Critical-race theory** can assist the model in challenging the deficit approach often taken when building supports for students from widening participation backgrounds (Delgado et al., 2017). **Self-determination theory and self-efficacy theories** are critical to understanding and supporting students' motivations to learn (Greene, 2018).

**CHALLENGES.** The first challenge was presenting a new ancillary fee for increased academic skills and tutoring support to fund the vision proposed. We succeeded in securing a significant increase in fees for 2021. Future challenges include building a customized faculty-focused communication plan; successfully hiring and training additional staff to support the model; approaching resource identification and creation with widening-participation backgrounds and institutional demographics as a core focus; informing and expanding programming to new faculties who have previously not made significant use of tutoring supports; and enhancing the culture of Learning Services to be more seamlessly data-informed and analysis-driven.

# Academic Preparedness Change Implementation Plan

1

Awakening Sep 20- Mar 21

**Gaps & Vision:** Conduct an environmental scan of academic preparedness models; survey faculty and students for academic skills needs; assess existing resources and gaps; survey associate deans and deans on academic skills needs (in-person). Reflect and consider online education delivery and new modalities for learning. Present an academic preparedness model as a vision for change to the institution in response to widening participation backgrounds, domestic and international student needs; connect theory and service gaps to this need for change.

**Stakeholders:** Students and faculty; associate deans and deans; external comparator schools and colleagues; Vice President, SEEM; Provost/Vice-Provost; AVP, Enrolment Innovation; AVP, Integrated Learning Services; Dean of Students; Registrar; Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL); Director, Enterprise Architecture and Innovation, Director, Learning Support and Early Intervention Services; Director, Library and Research; Institutional Research; Manager, Learning Services; Ancillary Fee Committee; Director, Career Integrated Learning.

2

Mobilization Apr 21-Aug 21

**Leverage & Communicate:** Enact a task force of multiple stakeholders and change agents; make informed decisions for academic preparedness priorities using institutional demographic data and gap analysis; set targets defined by faculty needs for academic skills in the classroom. Explore the development of an integrated academic and career readiness virtual hub. Renew culture of Learning Services, channels of communication and partnerships: Determine faculty-focused communications to support and realize change.

**Stakeholders:** Students and faculty; associate deans and deans; Vice President, SEEM; Provost/Vice-Provost; AVP, Enrolment Innovation; AVP, Integrated Learning Services; Dean of Students; Registrar; Centre for Teaching and Learning; Director, Enterprise Architecture and Innovation, Director, Learning Support and Early Intervention Services; Director, Library and Research; Institutional Research; Manager, Learning Services; Ancillary Fee Committee; Director, Career Integrated Learning; Academic Skills Librarian (co-chair) & task force incl. pan-institutional stakeholder membership; current Learning Services staff; MarComm; HR for job creation and hiring.

3

Acceleration Aug 21-Aug 22

**Outreach and Manage:** Employ and train galvanizing roles (pg. 13) and additional tutoring staff to develop and deliver academic preparedness model to the institution. Create conditions for learning that are inclusive of widening participation backgrounds and English language learners. Pilot integrated support hub or "LaunchPad". Transition toward faculty-aligned virtual support hubs.

**Stakeholders:** faculty members; galvanizing roles; program-specific tutors; part-time student employees; student supervisors; data technician; Manager, Learning Services; Academic Transition Program Manager; Library Liaisons and academic skills librarian; accessible learning staff; career counsellors; CTL for co-creation and delivery; SLATE staff & tools to deploy supports for faculty within the LMS; CPOD for training staff and team building; external training e.g. supplemental instruction, learning strategy studies.

4

Institutionalization Sep 22-2024

**Assess and Stabilize:** Deliver consistent academic resources across all faculties to meet targets. Develop an integrated data-informed culture and on-going analysis including outcome assessments that impact targets. Ensure full implementation of faculty-aligned virtual support hubs.

**Stakeholders:** Faculty partners, administration and professors for assessment, progress reporting and further changes; Academic Skills Librarian, galvanizing roles and learning services staff; Manager, Learning Services; communication channels for reporting back to the Ancillary Fee Committee, task force, college executives, student union, students, Board of Governors and other stakeholders.



# Galvanizing Roles

Fall 2021 funding secured through the student ancillary fee for academic support allows us to envision the following potential new roles:

## **Academic Transition Program Manager**

Design and implement academic transition programs for at-risk student populations, with a special focus on international students. The manager builds and delivers student-facing cultural transition programming and resources early in the first-year journey for students. Collaborates with CTL for building and delivering resources in D2L and helps at-risk populations adjust to their new learning environment.

## **Learning and Study Skills Strategist**

Develops academic preparedness resources and skills for students. The strategist works in collaboration with the Academic Skills Librarian to engage in institutional student demographics data and research related to the student experience and widening participation backgrounds. Targets supports for specific student demographics and unique student needs. Demographics may include BIPOC, mature, dual-credit, international, apprentice, first-generation, part-time students. The strategist also trains and regularly connects with the Writing/Math Study Skills Specialists.

## **Writing/Math + Study Skills Specialists**

TESL trained educators who provide tutoring in foundational literacies such as Math and English as well as tutoring in learning strategies, assistive technologies and study skills in both one-on-one sessions and small writing clinic sessions. This elevated tutoring position replaces current English and Math co-op students to provide the college with a more consistent, comprehensive and further skilled group of tutoring staff. Partnership with Sheridan's TESL program to hire recent graduates as well as placement students is also an opportunity.

## **Student Educational Technology Trainer**

Develops programming and provides support to student learning in essential online educational technologies and program-level softwares.

## **Early-Alert Data Specialist**

Delivers institutional, data-driven insights to drive academic preparedness programming. Works with IPA to identify courses with high attrition rates and breaches of academic integrity. Analyzes and reports impact of early-alert interventions including the organization of assessment, surveying and focus groups. Informed knowledge-keeper and colleague of the Academic Skills Librarian, Learning and Study Skills Strategist and Academic Integrity Office.

## **Well Series Coordinator**

Coordinates and ensures consistency in Well Series programming such as Start Well, Transition Well, Learn Well, Work Well, Graduate Well. The coordinator hires and oversees student employees who support the different Well programs through virtual communities and academic orientation.

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# Appendix A

# Academic Preparedness & S-Sense Alignment

Below is a review of the S-Sense competencies; the following page maps these competencies to the academic preparedness skills highlighted in this report.

## Think



1. Understands how the mind works and how to work with the mind well; articulates attentional and cognitive techniques that work with ambiguity and uncertainty and are self-effective; demonstrates cognitive flexibility; applies mindful meta-cognitive practices to employ critical thinking techniques that cultivate an ongoing awareness of habits, biases, mindsets, and assumptions.

## Relate



1. Works mindfully with emotion throughout learning, thinking, receiving feedback, creating, and engaging with others; articulates emotional regulation techniques that are self-effective.
2. Values connection and collaboration with others for personal growth and impact; actively seeks out perspectives of others; cares about impact on others; motivates and encourages others' expression of perspectives and ideas.
3. Cultivates and articulates awareness of social, cultural broader systems of human experience; seeks out diverse perspectives to ensure inclusive and socially aware mindsets, perspectives, decisions, and environments; aware of historical and lived experiences of dominant and oppressed groups within society(ies).

## Evolve



1. Approaches learning and learning from experience with active, self-authoring and self-reflective process; articulates evolving self, identity, perspectives, and self-practices that fuel self-awareness.
2. Approaches growth and potential, with curiosity, openness, and a sense of challenge; actively seeks out and values opportunities to experiment, to develop, and to learn; engages in and articulates practices that nurture learning from experience, continuous learning, growth, and potential.
3. Relates to aspects of self with understanding, kindness, a sense of common humanity; expresses empathy and sense of shared experience with others.

## Innovate



1. Values personal development of creative potential; applies scientific practices associated with creativity and entrepreneurship to generate approaches, solutions, and contributions that are responsive, informed, and move ideas forward; seeks to enhance discipline-specific approaches; articulates techniques that are self-effective.



# S-Sense Competencies

Academic Skill	Think	Relate			Evolve			Innovate
		1	2	3	1	2	3	
Time Management	✓	✓			✓	✓		
English language proficiency			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Foundational writing proficiency	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Interpersonal communication skills		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oral communication skills		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Online learning capability	✓		✓				✓	
Studying and test-taking skills	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Working with the required technology for program of study	✓				✓	✓		



# S-Sense Competencies

Academic Skill	Think	Relate			Evolve			Innovate
		1	2	3	1	2	3	
Ability to work well in groups	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Practicing a resilience mindset	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Understanding academic culture of host country	✓				✓			
Awareness of learning disabilities	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Note-taking skills	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Foundational math proficiency	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Post secondary level research skills	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Citation and referencing skills	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Pressure to academically succeed		✓	✓			✓		✓
Prior study experience		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Understanding academic jargon	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Experience with pedagogic approach	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓



# Appendix B



# Academic Skills Survey

298

Responses

09:12

Average time to complete

Closed

Status

1. Below is a list of factors that can influence the student academic experience. Based on your experience, please rate each factor for its impact on student academic success.

■ Little Impact   ■ Moderate Impact   ■ High Impact

Foundational Math proficiency

Foundational Writing proficiency

English language proficiency

Interpersonal and oral communication skills

Understanding academic culture of host country

Experience with pedagogic approach

Prior study experience

Online learning capability (eg. technology required; study habits; focus and taking assessments)

Understanding academic jargon (eg. assignments; GPA; appeals; other academic jargon)

Pressure to academically succeed

Awareness of learning disabilities

Post-secondary level research skills

Note-taking skills

Citation and referencing skills

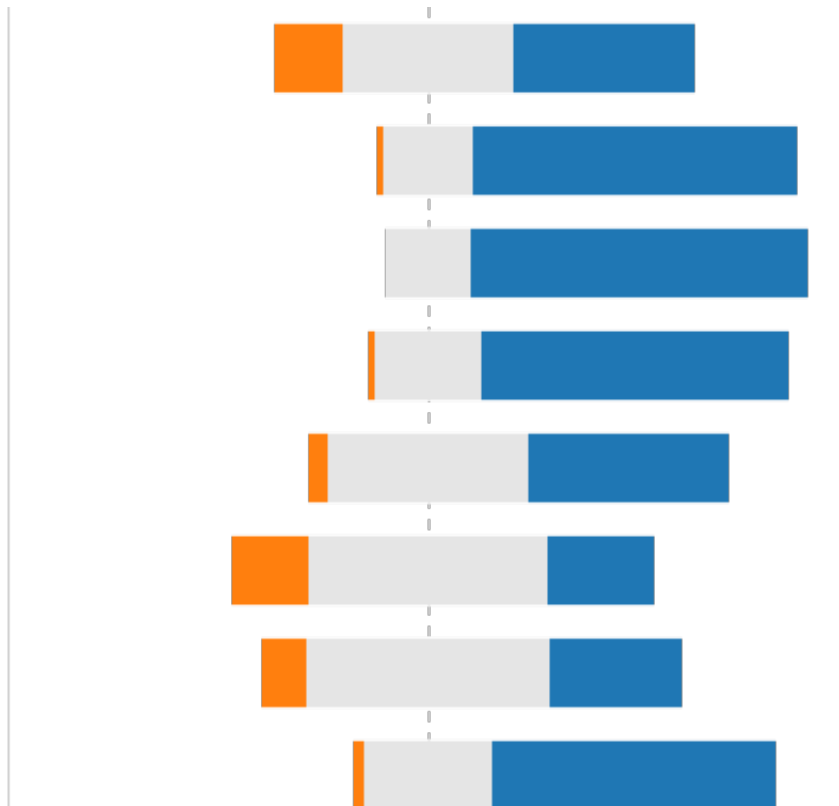
Time management skills

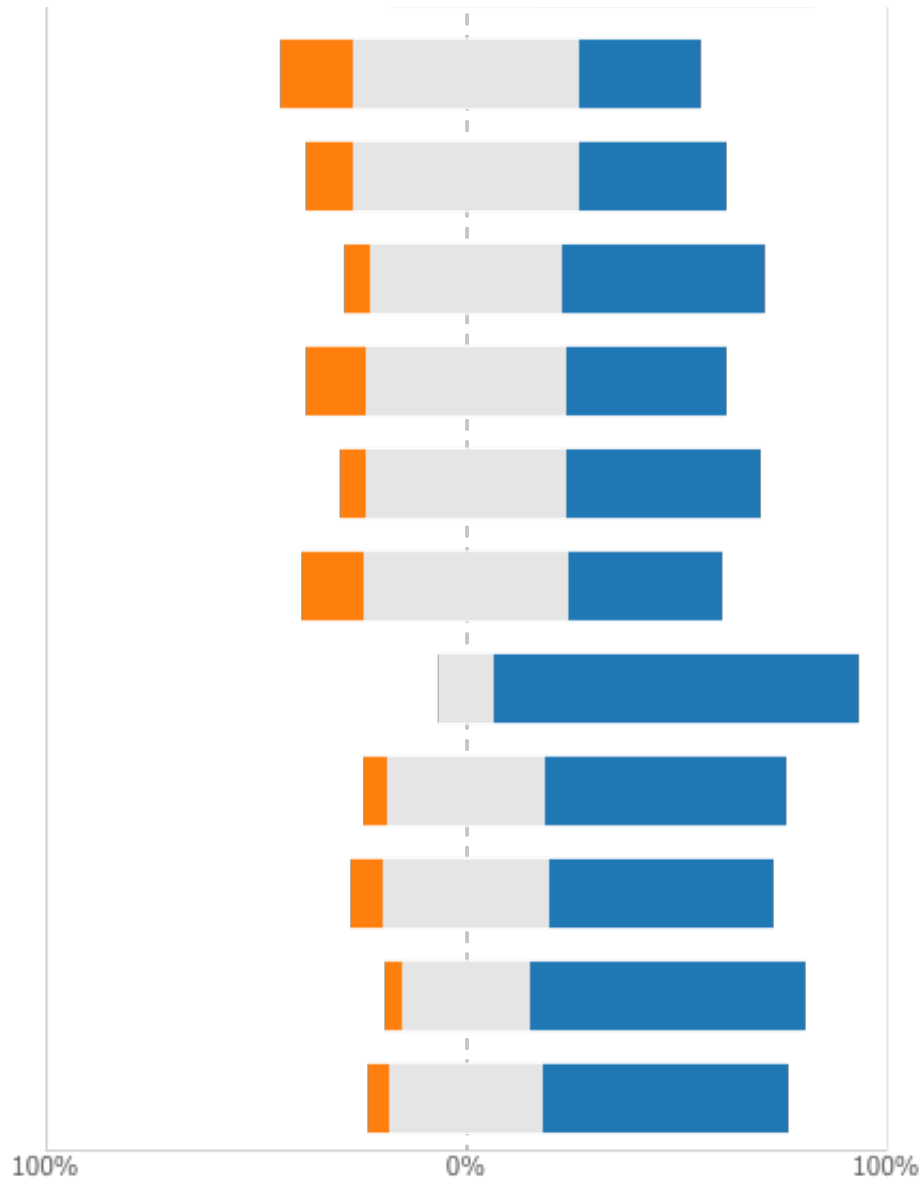
Ability to work well in groups

Practicing a resilience mindset

Studying and test taking skills

Working with the required technology for program of study (eg. MS Office applications like Word, Excel an...





2. What other academic factors should be considered when building student academic support programming?

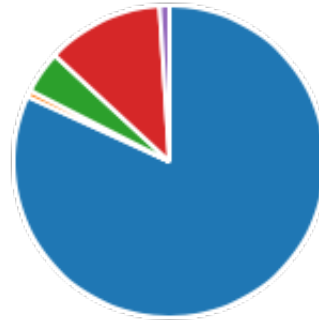
173  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"In these days of virtual learning, quality of Internet services an...*

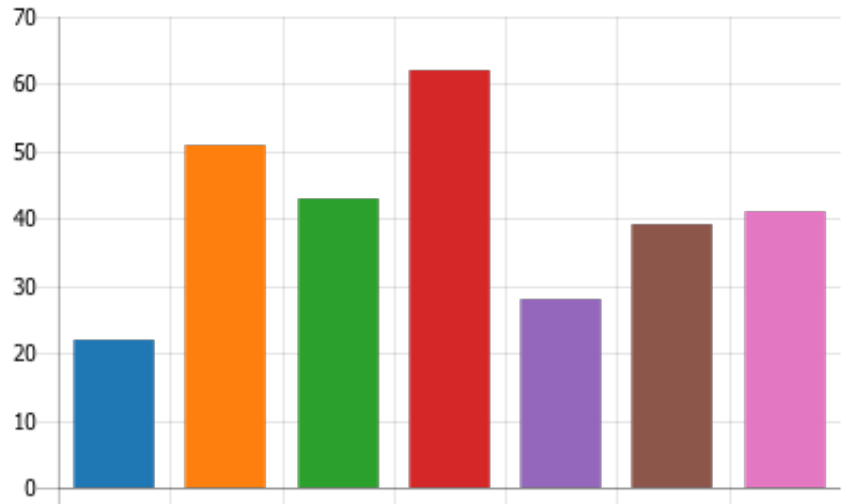
3. Please identify your primary employee group.

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Faculty	243
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Dean, Associate Dean	2
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Administration	13
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Support Staff	36
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Other	3



4. If you are teaching faculty or an Associate Dean or Dean, please indicate your faculty.

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> FHASS	22
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> PSB	51
<span style="color: green;">●</span> FAHCS	43
<span style="color: red;">●</span> FAST	62
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> FAAD	28
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> CAPS	39
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> I am not a teaching faculty me...	41



5. May we contact you for additional feedback? If yes, please confirm your email address in the "other" box below.

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Yes	85
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> No	106
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Other	100



# Appendix C



# Academic Skills Student Survey

**60**

Responses




**16:02**

Average time to complete

**Closed**

Status

1. Below is a list of factors that can influence the student academic experience. Based on your experience as both an employee and a student, please rate each factor for its impact on student academic success.

 Little Impact    Moderate Impact    High Impact

Foundational Math proficiency

Foundational Writing proficiency

English language proficiency

Interpersonal and oral communication skills

Understanding academic culture of host country

Experience with pedagogic approach

Prior study experience

Online learning capability (eg. technology required;  
study habits; focus and taking assessments)

Understanding academic jargon (eg. assignments; GPA; appeals; other academic jargon)

Pressure to academically succeed

Awareness of learning disabilities

Post-secondary level research skills

Note-taking skills

Citation and referencing skills

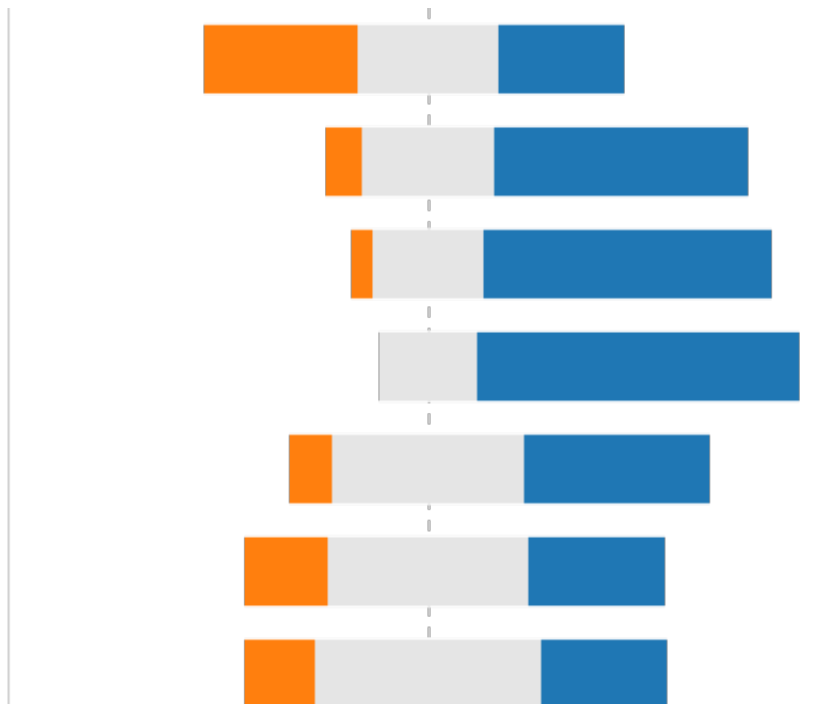
Time management skills

Ability to work well in groups

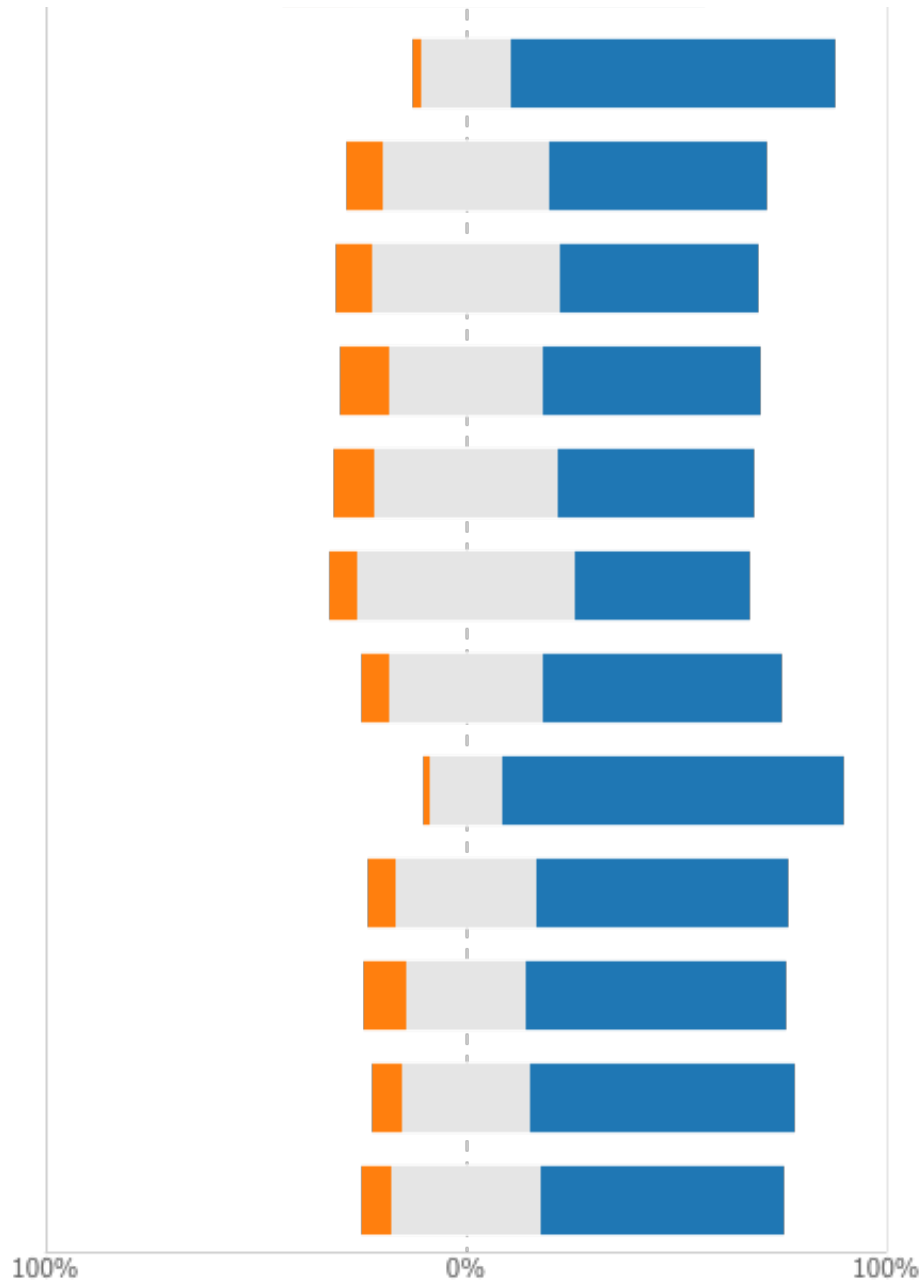
Practicing a resilience mindset

Studying and test taking skills

Working with the required technology for program of study (eg. MS Office applications like Word, Excel an...







2. What other academic factors should be considered when building student academic support programming?

39  
Responses

Latest Responses

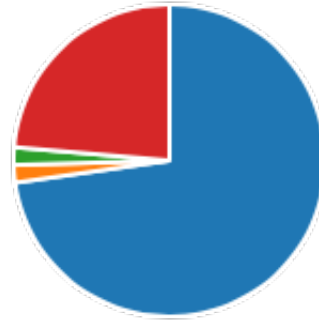
*"Grounding and stress management skills (particularly during Co..."*

*"Non-group work options- very difficult online"*

*"Perhaps learning styles. Also, I would ask there to be more adv..."*

### 3. Please identify your student employee role.

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Peer Mentor	40
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Learn Well PAL Tutor	1
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Learn Well Facilitator	1
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Other	13



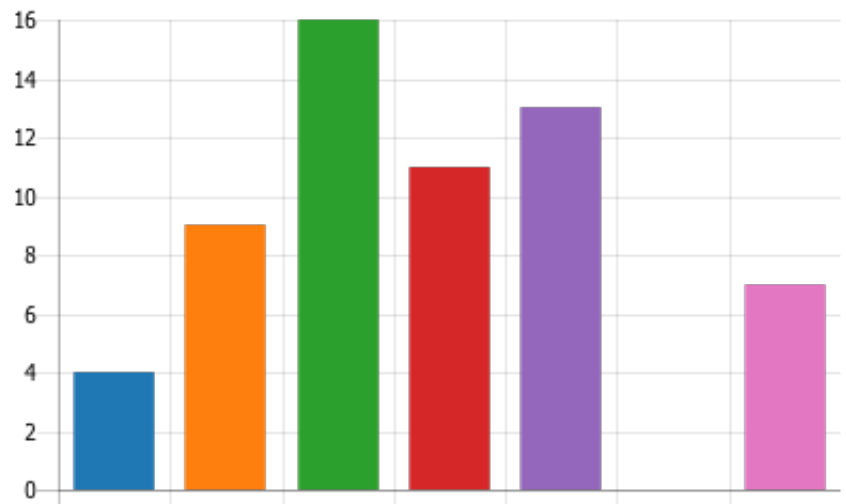
### 4. What year of study are you in at Sheridan?

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Year 1	16
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Year 2	22
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Year 3	12
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Year 4	8
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Other	2



### 5. Please indicate the faculty you are aligned to as a student.

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> FHASS	4
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> PSB	9
<span style="color: green;">●</span> FAHCS	16
<span style="color: red;">●</span> FAST	11
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> FAAD	13
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> CAPS	0
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> I don't know	7



6. May we contact you for additional feedback? If yes, please confirm your email address in the "other" box below.

<input type="radio"/> Yes	22
<input type="radio"/> No	18
<input type="radio"/> Other	19



# Appendix D

# Successful Models for Enhancing International Students' Academic Success: Research and Recommendations

## Prepared by

Joan Sweeney Marsh and Kathleen Oakey

## Created

Fall 2019 - Winter 2020

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## Executive Summary

*“International students are experiencing many barriers, implicit and explicit, inhibiting their ability to successfully settle, overcome academic barriers, and successfully transition into skilled/well paid employment. .... A poor arrival and transition experience – without adequate and continued supports - can impact the entire educational experience, which can concomitantly influence international students’ ability to persist academically, as well and successfully transition into the workforce and permanent residence.”*

*(Sullivan, 2017, p. 27-28)*

Based on the research, three different strategies for supporting International student academic success and retention are recommended:

1. **Transition programming or courses (pre- and post-arrival)** – to provide concrete strategies and instruction to support adaption from previous educational background to Sheridan’s learning environment, equip students for long-term academic success and begin early the transition from school to work through early alignment of academic literacy to career skills development.
2. **Access to teaching faculty members, frequent career-related and community networking events and organized social activities throughout the student’s journey** – to contribute to a sense of belonging and to encourage peer and community support, information sharing and regular networking opportunities with teaching faculty and industry representatives. Provide early guidance to career and employment landscape and link academic competencies to career skills development.
3. **Peer mentorship program** – to allow experienced International students to help new students navigate the academic environments; leverage first-language opportunities.

Combining all three strategies, to provide a multi-pronged approach, spanning from pre-departure and throughout a student’s academic career, is recommended, including specialized programming to climatize International students to career and work integrated learning skills and resources. Finding ways to better integrate domestic students and international students in order

to support mutually beneficial intercultural communication and to enhance Sheridan's globalization strategy is strongly encouraged.

Practical recommendations for transition programming or courses include:

1. Build adjustment opportunities for incoming International students to adapt to their new learning environment.
2. Leverage the classroom environment (online and in-class) to promote international student supports; embed assistance directly in learning environment.
3. Work with Instructional Designers to enhance active learning activities; Utilize ESL specialists to support accessible programs, services and supports.
4. Include study skills as part of a larger series on leaderships skills, life skills, employability skills, etc.
5. Provide subject/discipline-based language training (e.g., English for Artists, English for Engineers) and academic jargon awareness (e.g., assignment, LSM, flipped classroom, elective) at arrival and throughout the first term of studies. Students, especially ESL Learners, need time to learn and understand specialized language that is not typically included in ESL instruction.
6. Provide incentives for participation – point system, certificates, awards, prizes, etc.
7. Involve domestic and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year above International students in delivering academic supports. Utilize first-language skills when possible in early stages of transition.
8. Encourage faculty to network and engage with International students outside of the classroom. Consider alternative networking facilitators (e.g., Industry and community experts, administrators) when faculty are unavailable. Collaborate cross-departmentally.
9. Consider scalability – how can we reach as many students as possible?

In addition, research emphasizes that International students truly benefit from a cultural shift at the institutional level, that faculty-student interactions are important in establishing a smooth transition, and that adequate training for faculty and staff alike to ensure international students receive the support they require at the course level. The need to move from a deficit narrative and to one of globalization and opportunity should be reinforced across the community. Interculturalizing the curriculum will allow all students to see themselves in their Learning and will act to promote a more inclusive experience for all students.

In support of this cultural shift, stakeholders across Sheridan emphasized a need to better understand International students' previous learning experiences in order to help prepare students for their new learning experience at Sheridan. To accomplish this, we need to explore and develop supports that will help to bridge populations of students from similar backgrounds (e.g., Indian education system) to Sheridan's learning environment.



## Environmental and Research Scan

Approaches to international student retention and success are largely based on work by Astin (1984) and Tinto (2010) regarding retention and success strategies for general student populations. Andrade (2006), is often cited regarding adjustment factors specifically for international students.

In 2011, the University of Windsor completed one of the most comprehensive studies on international student retention in Canada. They identified a variety of retention risk factors, recommendations for action, and list several departmental strategies that have proved successful at UW. See [http://www.uwindsor.ca/international-development/sites/uwindsor.ca.international-development/files/final\\_report\\_sisrp\\_july\\_26\\_2011\\_0.pdf](http://www.uwindsor.ca/international-development/sites/uwindsor.ca.international-development/files/final_report_sisrp_july_26_2011_0.pdf)

## Peer Mentoring

PROGRAMS			
YorkU	<a href="#">Global Peer Program</a>	Matches experienced International students with new International students. Includes participation in events and activities.	York International
Humber	<a href="#">Connect</a>	Matches returning International students with new International students. Includes participation in bi-monthly events and other campus activities.	International Centre
MemorialU	<a href="#">MUN Mentors</a> (also see <a href="#">research article</a> )	Matches senior, domestic students with new International students. Includes participation in multi-cultural events.	Internationalization Office
URegina	<a href="#">UR International Peer Advisor Program</a>	Matches current domestic and international students with new international students. Includes participation in a variety of events, workshops, etc.	Global Learning Centre
UAlberta	<a href="#">Peer Program</a>	Matches UAlberta students with new international students. Includes participation in a variety of social events (eg. Coffee, sports, potlucks)	International Student Services
NAIT	<a href="#">International Student Peer Mentors</a>	Matches current students with international and newcomer students. Includes a participation in a variety of on- and off-campus activities.	International Centre
UCalgary	<a href="#">International Student Mentorship Program</a>	Matches current UCalgary students with new international students. Includes a meet and greet event.	International Student Services
UWaterloo	<a href="#">International Peer Community</a>	Matches upper-year international students with new students. Includes monthly events and activities. Includes a meet and greet event.	Student Success Office
ULethbridge	<a href="#">International Student Mentorship Program</a>	Matches continuing uLethbridge students with new international students. Includes a	International Student Services

		meet and greet event, and at least one other organized activity.	
Vancouver Island University	<a href="#">Peer Helper Program</a>	Matches current students with international students. Includes training sessions, workshops and a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service.	Faculty of International Education
BrockU	<a href="#">Mentorship Program</a>	Matches upper year students with incoming international students. Includes a meet and greet event.	International Services
WesternU	<a href="#">International Peer Connection (IPC) Program</a>	Matches upper-year students with new international students. Includes participation at various events and activities.	International & Exchange Student Centre
MacEwanU	<a href="#">Student Mentors</a>	Matches a fellow student with a new international student.	MacEwan International
Wilfred Laurier	<a href="#">International Student Advisors (ISA)</a>	Appointments can be scheduled, or arranged during drop-in hours	International Student Support
UToronto	<a href="#">Transition Advisors</a>	Appointments must be booked online.	Centre for International Experience
UWindsor	<a href="#">Connecting4Success</a> (see <a href="#">conference presentation</a> )	Matches senior level students, professional staff and faculty members with new international students.	International Student Centre
Rutgers University	<a href="#">International Friendship Program</a>	A cross-cultural social initiative that unites Rutgers international students and scholars with domestic Rutgers students and scholars and local community members in a comfortable environment that is conducive to friendship and learning.	Rutgers Global
<b>RESEARCH STUDIES</b>			
<a href="#">Effects of a peer program on International student adjustment.</a>	Abe, J., Talbot, D. M., & Geelhoed, R. J. (1998). <i>Journal of College Student Development</i> , 39(6)	“The IPP participants scored significantly higher than the control group on the Social Adjustment subscale. This finding suggests that the ongoing, organized interactions created by the IPP enhanced the international students' interpersonal skills, which are crucial for success in the campus environment. Although not statistically significant, IPP participants scored higher than the control group on the SACQ full scale and subscales (see Table 4), indicating better self-assessed adjustment. The types of activities emphasized during the pilot IPP were mainly social events (e.g., tailgate parties, movies, homecoming events). The pilot program did not emphasize academics, group development, and university spirit, which may explain why the differences for the Academic Adjustment and Institutional Attachment subscales were not significant.” (p. 545)	

<a href="#">A qualitative investigation of U.S. students' experiences in an international peer program.</a>	Geelhoed, R. J., Abe, J., & Talbot, D. M. (2003). <i>Journal of College Student Development</i> , 44(1)	"The evaluation of the International Peer Program in this study revealed that host students' experiences could be enhanced in key ways. First, a more accurate assessment of host students' expectations and inter-cultural competency must be implemented... Second, the pre-program training must address the needs of the participants revealed through this assessment. Based on the current study, potential topics may include: (a) assisting students in self-assessment of their own motivations and goals for participating in the program; (b) preparing students for the initial discomfort that often occurs when meeting their partners for the first time; and (c) helping students build better interpersonal skills, especially in intercultural relationships." (p. 15-16)
<a href="#">Helping the transition: Mentorship to support international students in Canada</a>	Thomson, C., & Esses, V. M. (2016). <i>Journal of International Students</i> , 6(4), 873-886.	"The pattern of results obtained suggests that the mentorship program developed for this research was effective at facilitating positive changes for international students on the outcomes measured over time. The paired-samples comparisons for program participants suggest that they experienced increases on sociocultural and psychological adaptation, and a reduction in acculturative stress over time. The independent-samples comparisons suggest that in comparison to a control group, the program students, who had the opportunity to make a host-Canadian friend over the course of the semester, showed higher psychological adaptation and lower acculturative stress at the end of the semester." (p. 881)

## Workshops & Courses

PROGRAMS			
YorkU	<a href="#">Global Connections</a>	Student-led workshops. Held online, pre-departure.	York International
Humber	<a href="#">Passport to Success</a>	Series of workshops. Students collect points for participation. Accumulated points result in prize achievement. Includes tutoring hours, etc.	International Centre
BrockU	<a href="#">Intercultural Awareness Program</a>	A variety of options for intercultural training and development for both students and employees.	International Services
	<a href="#">Workshop Series</a>	A variety of academic strategy workshops.	International Services
	<a href="#">Passport to Success</a>	A variety of challenges to encourage students to discover new and creative ways to use English. Students submit their experiences for a chance to win a draw.	ESL Services

UWindsor (see <a href="#">conference presentation</a> )	<a href="#">S.T.E.P.S. (Skills to Enhance Personal Success)</a>	Sessions that introduce practical methods to help students improve learning and study skills	International Student Centre
	<a href="#">Bounce Back</a>	8 week series during the Winter semester. Focus on effective learning strategies as well as social adjustments, stress, etc.	International Student Centre
URgina	<a href="#">Global Learning Centre Workshops</a>	Series of workshops. Held weekly.	UR International
NAIT	<a href="#">Newcomer Booster</a> See <a href="#">newsreport</a>	Week-long program before the start of classes. Cost \$100.	International Centre
Wilfred Laurier	<a href="#">Intercultural Certificate</a>	A six-module program to support participants' development of intercultural skills, knowledge, and attitudes.	Global Engagement and Exchanges
WesternU	<a href="#">Canada Eh? Transition to Canada Series</a>	A series of information sessions to help international students adjust to life in Canada.	International & Exchange Centre
	<a href="#">Start Strong – Strategies for Academic Success</a>	An academic workshop series for new and returning international students. 3 workshops in series, scheduled for the start of term.	International & Exchange Centre
	<a href="#">Talking about Life in Canada (TALK)</a>	Weekly discussion topics. (ex. making new friends, communicating across cultures, managing change and stress)	International & Exchange Centre
<b>RESEARCH STUDIES</b>			
<a href="#">The value of a first-year seminar: International students' insights in retrospect.</a>	Andrade, M. S. (2009). <i>Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory &amp; Practice</i>	“[Students] indicated that the seminar positively impacted their active learning behaviors although such behaviors are sometimes unfamiliar to those from different educational backgrounds. Students reported regular participation in curricular and cocurricular activities and involvement with diverse peers. Furthermore, these behaviors had generally increased in the first semester and continued to increase over time.” (p. 500-501)	
<a href="#">Reducing inequality in academic success for incoming college students: A randomized trial of growth mindset and belonging interventions.</a> (citation only)	Broda, M., Yun, J., Schneider, B., Yeager, D. S., Walton, G. M., & Diemer, M. (2018). <i>Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness</i> , 11(3), 317.	“7,686 students, representing more than 90% of incoming first-year students at a large Midwestern public university, were randomly assigned to an online growth mindset intervention, social belonging intervention, or a comparison group. Results suggest that after the fall semester, the growth mindset intervention significantly improved grade point averages for Latino/a students by about 0.40 points. This represents a 72% reduction in the GPA gap between White and Latino/a students. Further, this effect was replicated for both spring semester GPA and cumulative GPA. These findings indicate that light-touch interventions may be a minimally invasive approach to	

		improving academic outcomes for underrepresented students. Our findings also highlight the complexity of implementing customized belonging interventions in heterogeneous contexts.” (Abstract)
<a href="#">An academic and cultural transition course for international students: Efficacy and socio-emotional outcomes</a>	Brunsting, N. C., Smith, A. C., & Zachry, C. (2018). <i>Journal of International Students</i> , 8(4), 1497-1521.	“Results revealed significant increases in participants' (n = 42) perceived intercultural competence, perspective shifting, suspending judgment, self-advocacy, and interacting in class with students of other cultures; participants also reported significantly higher campus belonging and social support than a comparison group of students at the university who were not enrolled in the course (n = 32).” (p. 1497)
<a href="#">Improving the social, linguistic, and academic success of Chinese international students.</a>	Dixon, B. A. (2014). <i>ProQuest Dissertations and Theses</i>	“This study showed that Summer Bridge did improve the transition process of Chinese students by acclimating them to the American classroom experience; by helping them to become comfortable both on campus and in the neighboring community; and by helping them to improve their English language proficiency through the practice of reading textbooks, writing academic papers, and speaking both inside and outside of class with fellow students and professors. This research suggests that institutions should develop international orientation programs that are longer in length and that help acclimate students to both the new academic and social setting.” (p. 131)

## Student Advisory Group

PROGRAMS			
UAlberta	<a href="#">International Student Advisory Committee (ISAC)</a>	A student working group dedicated to sharing perspectives on international student programs and services and increasing international student engagement with the campus at large.	International Student Services
RESEARCH STUDIES			
<a href="#">Success programs for International students: A program initiative at New York University Silver School of Social Work</a>	Cambell-Schiff, C., & O’Mealley, C. R. (2010). <i>Journal of Student Affairs at New York University</i> , 6	“The authors’ findings indicate that international students at the SSSW are more engaged, contribute a great deal to the classroom and community, and succeed academically. As international student enrollments continue to grow, student and academic affairs professionals need to be prepared to adequately support the social and intellectual development of this student population. It is also evident that social capital or social and intellectual development may be achieved through providing support services to international	

		students that help them acclimate to the academic and social environments of their respective campus.” (p. 6)
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### Academic Support and Programing Offered by Ontario Colleges

Algonquin	Provides series of workshops, as well as refers students to <b>Essential Study Skills website</b> (by Student Support Services).	<a href="#">Link</a>
Humber	<b>Passport to Success</b> : Points-based series of workshops covering leadership skills, life skills, employability skills, and study skills.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Mohawk	Provides a <b>Language &amp; Culture Centre</b> (mostly social). Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
George Brown	Provides <b>International Student Advising</b> . Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Seneca	Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Fanshawe	Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Conestoga	Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Canadore	Refers students to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Centennial	Refers students to regular student services. Provides International Student Advising.	<a href="#">Link</a>
Fleming	Refers student to regular student services.	<a href="#">Link</a>

(as of Jan 2020)

## Sheridan Community Interviews

From January to March 2020, Joan Sweeney Marsh carried out a series of interviews with Administrators, Faculty and Staff from across Sheridan. List of participants:

- Danielle Palombi: Director, Learning Support and Early Alert Intervention Services
- Stephanie Samboo: Associate Dean in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences who oversees the ESL program
- Sara Cumming: Professor of Sociology with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Mark Orlando: Associate Dean, School of Applied Computing
- Mardy Fraser: Manager, Academic Initiatives, Office of the Provost
- Sheela Iyer: Professor & Program Coordinator, Sheridan Veterinary Technician Program
- Patrice Esson: Acting Associate Director, International Services
- Paula Ogg (May 2020): Educational Development Consultant, Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Kathleen Oakey: FHASS Liaison Librarian
- Mark Chapman: Executive Director, Integrated Planning and Analysis
- Janene Christiansen: Deputy Registrar, Enrolment Services

## External Interviews - Phone Call Responses

### NAIT

**Call With:** Freya Fu and Patrick Sullivan

**Meeting Notes:** Wednesday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019

### UAlberta

**Call With:** Kumarie Achaibar-Morrison

**Meeting Notes:** Tuesday, July 2, 2019

### UAlberta

**Call With:** Kumarie Achaibar-Morrison

**Meeting Notes:** Tuesday, July 2, 2019



## Further Reading

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## Appendix A: ESL Sheridan Tutor Reflection from FALL 2019

### Week 3:

Currently, the way I have been approaching tutoring is by asking the student what their needs are. The goal is to see what they need help with, and what is the best way to help them. It is important to ensure they are aware that they are in a safe space with no judgement and that we will do everything in our power to help them. By beginning the session this way, the student will feel more comfortable doing what they came to do; learn. As a psychology major, my focus has been mainly directed toward diminishing frustration in students registered with Accessible Learning.

### Week 11:

Throughout the term, I have developed indispensable knowledge about the effect my tutoring has on my multilingual students. The opportunity to look critically into Translingualism has allowed me to change the way I go through sessions with students, analyze my feelings regarding these appointments, and reflect on how my actions exacerbate racial inequities within the tutoring center. My tutoring methods have gone from goal oriented to process oriented. Instead of focusing on producing a product the professor wants to see, I aim to help students create work they are proud of. Reading different articles on Translingualism has also helped me resist frustrations when working through particularly difficult sessions with students who speak English as a second language. These articles have reminded me of the difficulties these students go through trying to speak and write in an entirely new language, in a country where not everyone is welcoming. Understanding this has been important for critically thinking about whether my frustrations are valid. I have been able to take a closer look at my anger towards racial injustices and better appreciate my joy of being able to provide a positive experience to individuals who are used to being inaccurately judged. Additionally, my understanding of the role I play in these issues has been greatly expanded. Throughout this process it was brought to my attention that writing centers can perpetuate hate and because language is so closely tied with culture, it can present the idea that cultures tied to Standard English should be held in higher regard. With this in mind, I attempted to focus less on perfect grammar, and instead spend more time on ensuring the student got their desired message across. The effects these changes have evidently had on students has been astounding. One session that I believe was a direct result of my time studying Translingualism came at the end of the semester. A student came in for the first time for help with a presentation on The Treatment of Immigrants. Once she had reached a specific slide detailing the kind of discrimination they face, she began to cry, explaining to me that she was so upset with the ways in which she was treated. I listened intently as she spoke further about how happy she was to come to the tutoring center for help and meet someone who finally just wanted to help her say what she wanted to say. We talked for a long time about what it's like for someone in Canada who speaks English as a second language, and how sometimes she wants to give up, but she never will because she is an example for her children. I spoke about our project and how we were trying to make Sheridan a better place. By the end of the appointment, the passion and determination were alive in both of us, and I was left with a memory I will never forget.


# Appendix E

2019

# The Student Experience: Engaging in Cultural and Economic Shifts in Higher Education

Danielle Palombi  
*Sheridan College*

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The Student Experience:

Engaging in Cultural and Economic Shifts in Higher Education

Danielle Palombi

Sheridan College



## The Student Experience:

## Engaging in Cultural and Economic Shifts in Higher Education

We work in a VUCA world. VUCA—volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous—are “the specific dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and “are being driven by a marriage of six mega-trends: globalization, technology, digitization, individualization, demographic change and the environmental crisis” (Elkington, Steege, Glick-Smith, & Breen, 2017, “The Context of Leading,” para. 2). In *Managing in a VUCA World*, the authors write “the forces outlined in the VUCA model are beginning to wend their way into the rarefied environment of academe and are necessitating an existential reappraisal of higher education institutions” (Stewart, Anshuman, & Schatz, 2016, p. 242). The forces outlined in their model are Ecology, Economics, Culture and Politics (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 241). They indicate that two of these four realms will be challenges for higher education, stating “the main challenges to higher education institutions are in the cultural and economic domains” (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 244). In addition, they assert “the requirement for higher education institutions to...act as self-sustaining entities...is creating a fundamental shift in both the internal and external perspective of what higher education institutions are” (Stewart et. al, 2016, p. 246). VUCA is “becoming the normal context for leadership, and requires leaders to adopt appropriate perspectives and skill sets” (Elkington et al., 2017, “The Context of Leading,” para. 2). This essay explores culture and economics as dynamics of VUCA and their relationship to the invigoration of the student experience in higher education (HE). For HE institutions, critically engaging in the student experience may be essential for succeeding in the VUCA world because of its significance in the competing marketplace, the response it provides to changing student demographics, and the effort needed to retain and graduate students.

## **The Student Experience**

What is the relationship between the student experience and the culture and economic forces of VUCA in higher education (HE)? New and active examples of signature student experience initiatives around well-being, employability and success can be found within many HE institutions. For example, McGill University, in Quebec, Canada offers SKILLS21, a highly-collaborative initiative led by their Teaching and Learning department; it is a “workshop-based skills development program for undergraduate students; it provides opportunities for developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, values and attitudes” (McGill University, SKILLS21, 2018). There are six streams in this program and if students complete five workshops within a stream they achieve co-curricular recognition; there are currently more than fifty workshops offered through the program (McGill University, SKILLS21 Streams, 2018). For first-year or beginning-year students, Centennial College in Ontario, Canada facilitates “Experience Centennial Orientation” for student transitions into college that includes learning goals related to self-awareness, relationships, and the exploration of finding resources and tools to support their success (Centennial, 2018). At Humber College in Ontario, Canada, students are offered “Strong Start”, a workshop series for the first six weeks of classes designed as an orientation to college life for first-year students (Humber College, 2018). Finally, at Mohawk College they offer “Start Smart”, an orientation for first-year students with a focus on academic skills (Mohawk College, n.d.). These student experience initiatives and ones like them in other HE institutions could be a response to the cultural and economic forces of VUCA described by Elkington et al., 2017 and Stewart et al., 2016 in the opening of this essay.

Before understanding why HE may be engaging in the student experience in response to VUCA forces, it is important to explore how institutions define the student experience. At Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada, its Academic Plan for 2017-2022 identifies the goal of enhancing the student experience through programs, services and space design, stating “the student experience at Sheridan transcends the classroom to include both curricular and co-curricular spheres. It is enhanced by interactions with peers, faculty and staff” (Sheridan College, 2017). In addition, the Academic Plan notes “student engagement is correlated with a broad array of success and development outcomes, including satisfaction, persistence, retention and GPA attainment” (Sheridan College, 2017). According to the website *Improving the Student Experience in Higher Education*, created by HE consultant Michelle Morgan from Bournemouth University in Poole, England, the student experience “encompasses all aspects of student life (i.e. academic, social, welfare and support) with the academic imperative at the heart of it” (Morgan, 2018, para. 1). It “occurs throughout the student lifecycle, from first contact through to becoming an alumni” and is “critical to the success in higher education today for both the student and the institution” (Morgan, 2018, para. 1). According to The Higher Education Academy’s research report on *Managing the student experience in a shifting higher education landscape*, the student experience is defined as “the totality of a student’s interaction with the institution” (Temple, Callender, Grove, & Kersh, 2014, p. 3). The research report reviews “the student journey”, and divides it into four different experience categories including application, academic, campus and graduation (Temple et al., 2014, p. 3). Lastly, the student experience has also been described as being a concept that goes beyond just teaching and learning, with seven unique identifiers related to student expectations about university and student life, transition, peers, parents, culture, media, the program itself, extra-curricular activity and graduate employability

(Jones, 2010, pp. 1-3). In short, it appears that the student experience is a holistic, cultural concept that exceeds the classroom and begins the moment a potential student connects with an HE institution and continues to life as a graduate and alumni.

### **The Student Experience and The Need to Compete**

While there is increased need for learning credentials in a VUCA world “the growth in the demand for education, continuous learning and professional development is expanding the size of the higher education market...” (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 247), HE institutions seem to be competing more aggressively, perhaps partially due to private or corporate competition. “Increased demand for learning credentials combined with the above average inflation increases in tuition is providing increasing incentives to for-profit organizations to enter the market place” (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 247). Citing an example from the University of Phoenix, a corporate institution, Stewart et al. explain that in 2012, the school enrolled over 300,000 students “which changes the catchment areas that institutions have taken as a given in their enrollment forecasting” (2016, p. 247). The examples to follow are from Canadian institutions, but research shows targeted student experience approaches from around the world. Attempts at developing technology-mediated advising (Jaggars & Karp, 2016), utilizing learning analytics as a counterpart to student experience surveys (Borden & Coates, 2017), enhancing the college student experience through leisure education (Jordan, Gagnon, Anderson, & Pilcher, 2018), and offering extra-curricular student experience activities to contribute to graduate outcomes (Milner, Cousins, & McGowan, 2016) all appear in student experience research and make the argument in one form or another to focus more on the student and their experience in HE. Coupled with the economic and cultural forces of VUCA on HE, a shift in an institution’s focus toward a signature student experience in and outside of the classroom is favourable to their arguments. While

service areas of an institution will likely have always advocated for more or enhanced student supports, the nature of these requests and recommendations may have transcended their service areas and are being heard by HE institutions on a greater level, as indicated in the following cases.

At Western University in Ontario, Canada, the institution advertises itself as offering “Canada’s best student experience” (Western University, 2016, Letter section, para. 5). The student experience is defined as a means to “support the whole learner’s growth through programs, services and experiences that foster well-being, build connections and develop skills” (Western University, 2016, Student Experience What section, para. 1). Western’s model highlights wellness initiatives, indigenous services, student success services, sports and recreation services, student development, entrepreneurship and their very own Office of the Associate Vice President of the Student Experience (Western University, 2016, Student Experience wheel section). At Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, the institution launched a Student Experience Initiative, a “multi-year collaboration among faculty, staff and students to help students have the best possible experience” (Simon Fraser University, n.d., para. 1). Their aim is to “develop high-impact opportunities for student engagement with the SFU community”, and their hope is for a cultural shift to “become increasingly more student-focused and holistically supportive...an accessible, healthy learning environment where students feel a sense of belonging” (Simon Fraser University, n.d., para. 2). And lastly, through Academic Impressions, a membership-based HE training and solution service, the University of Alberta, in Alberta, Canada, is cited for its “High-Performing Student Services Model” in the Office of the Registrar (Padfield, 2017). The university paired with the solutions service to establish a “one-stop shop” to reduce wait times for services and the number of in-person

inquiries, and to increase the rates of student satisfaction, student engagement, the ability to support faculty as well as to foster more regular communication between units (Padfield, 2017, Results section, para. 2).

Two of the three examples above chose the word “best” when referring to their student experience. These three examples in addition to those briefly noted in the introduction to this section all point to an investment in time and money to invigorate and brand the student experience. Focusing on the student experience allows these institutions to advertise its efforts toward students, to compete with one another, and to stand out as a leader. The bold declaration of offering “the very best” of anything demonstrates that that institutions have arrived to compete in the realm of the student experience with the hope of standing out among competitors. The pressure to focus on this differentiating factor of the student experience for HE leaders is steeped in the dynamics of VUCA. It speaks to the argument from Stewart et al. cited earlier that culture and economics are the biggest VUCA forces on HE (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 244); a student experience is cultural, and HE institutions are responding with cultural advances.

### **The Student Experience and Changing Student Populations**

Changing student demographics in HE means meeting the variable needs of students and the growing numbers of first-year students, first-generation students, mature students, students with disabilities, part-time students, international students, dual-institution students and transfer students. When researching the student experience for the student groups outlined above, a robust amount of recent data and reports have become available. Institutions are paying attention to their student demographics and those students’ unique experiences in HE. The vigour being paid to the research around the student experience and the unique experiences of student groups

may speak to the cultural and economic pressures Stewart et. al write about in their chapter on HE in the VUCA world (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 244).

Some examples of effort put toward learning about the student experience of these student groups include the University of Guelph, in Ontario, Canada researching online courses for first-year students and attempting to recreate the benefits of an in-person first-year seminar in an online format using enquiry based-learning (Murray, Lachowsky, & Green, 2017). Another, on first-generation college students considers providing programs and professional development to help advisors address the complex issues facing first-generation students (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016). An interesting study on the learning experience of mature students (students who began their studies over the age of 40), suggests that confidence is of critical importance in underpinning their student experience, and that increased confidence leads to better time management, more integration into the wider student body, and a potential positive impact on their retention (Pearce, 2017). An additional mature student study is a 2016 collaborative study from the University of Guelph and Queen's University in Ontario, Canada where they explore the issues affecting the success of mature students as a growing and traditionally overlooked population; their study includes findings that mature students struggle with accessing needed resources, supports services and flexible study options (van Rhijn, Lero, Bridge, & Fritz, 2016, p. 29). A call for changes to institutional policies and practices, the creation of social support networks for mature students and increased access to financial support is made (van Rhijn et al., 2016, p. 29).

For students with disabilities, another group “representing a growing population for higher education on college campuses” (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017, p. 311), a study through three U.S. HE institutions ventures that while student supports for students with

disabilities have increased in response to this changing demographic, “campus-wide responsiveness to inclusion and actions that promote self-advocacy are needed to increase the rates of persistence and graduation among this underrepresented student group” (Fleming et al., 2017, p. 311). For part-time students, Nicole E. Lee from the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada writes “Part-time learners have had a history of campus isolation, fewer opportunities to engage on campus, and much higher attrition rates than their full-time peers”; her study attempts to “uncover effective ways of enhancing the academic and social experiences of part-time learners and in turn, increase retention rates” (2018, p. 1). Additionally, a study on the international student experience and satisfaction shares that since many HE institutions have increased their international student body, to effectively serve this growing population is important, and also compares how support services for international students are structured at Spanish and U.S. institutions (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016).

And finally, for the student experience related to student enrolled in integrated collaborate college and university programs, researchers performed a study of South Central Ontario Universities and Colleges to find that “promoting opportunities for collaborative students to learn and socialize together...from early in their programs may be of benefit. Similarly, college and university policies and procedures should be examined in relation to any unintended stigmatizing effect on collaborative students” (Landeem et al., 2017, p. 148). The authors point to the “increasingly common” joint college/university programs as “governments attempt to address imbalances in student access to education as well as society-and industry-driven human resource requirements” and argues that while the “dual-identity was positive for some, the experiences of inadequate communication and stigma or discrimination were common across programs, underscoring the urgency of addressing these issues that impact the student



experience” (Landeem et al., 2017, p. 149). Lastly, a study on transfer students and what administration can do to improve their experience found that the quality of advisement, the issue of communication between students and their advisors, the college and the university, and within individual departments are all factors to consider when planning for the transfer student experience (Walker & Okpala, 2017). A recommendation for transformational leadership to help transfer students feel important on campus, and the ability to think about improving the success of the transfer student population on campus is the final recommendation (Walker & Okpala, 2017, pp. 42-43).

Almost all of the studies on these student groups explain that their particular student populations under study are growing (van Rhijn et al., 2016, Fleming et al., 2017, Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016, & Landeem et al., 2017). Non-traditional students and their student experiences are likely a growing tradition for HE as marketplace competition increases, as catchments change, and as globalization and technology allow students to enroll virtually from around the world. The more the student experience is considered and highlighted for the non-traditional student, the more choice and opportunities non-traditional students have at their disposal, which increases an institution’s potential recruitment, competitive edge and appeal. Investing in the student experience as a cultural differentiator for all students is a response to VUCA forces and may be critical for competing in today’s HE marketplace.

### **The Student Experience and The Cost of Retaining and Losing Students**

The vigor of research and public positioning on the student experience in HE underscores engagement in this cultural differentiator, but also emphasizes the topic of retention. Retention speaks to the economic domain of VUCA pressures highlighted in the introduction of this essay from Stewart et al. (2016, p. 244). Institutional leaders are aware of and often deeply understand

that the costs related to losing a student are significant. Responding to retention through critically engaging in the student experience not only responds to the cultural pressures of VUCA, but also to retention, a long-standing concern for HE.

Retention is a regularly occurring topic in HE; “student retention has been one of the most widely studied areas in higher education in the last four decades” (Xu, 2017, p. 50); alongside retention comes the topic of student engagement:

Researchers have been studying student engagement—the intersection of student behaviours and institutional conditions—in order to understand how institutional environment and the academic and social norms therein influence students’ learning experiences, their interactions with peers and faculty, and persistence and success (Xu, 2017, p. 50).

Looking back to the definition of the student experience from earlier in this essay, it becomes clear that the student experience and student engagement are closely related. Sheridan follows its goal to enhance the student experience with the supporting statement “student engagement is correlated with a broad array of success and development outcomes, including satisfaction, persistence, retention and GPA attainment” (Sheridan College, 2017). Xu writes “the role of institutional conditions in student engagement has been gaining attention because it is unrealistic to hold only students responsible for engaging themselves; rather, faculty members and administrators should foster conditions that promote student engagement” (2017, p. 51). Xu adds “interventions to improve students’ social and academic engagement may help to improve their commitment to the institution and the retention rate” (Xu, 2017, p. 59). When reading with

the dynamics of VUCA in mind, the author's argument to create a supportive learning environment for students makes the impetus to focus on the student experience feel essential:

It may be an opportune time for institutional administrators to re-examine how retention efforts are organized and to develop strategic approaches to utilizing resources more effectively in order to translate institutional commitment to student success into an intentional creation of a supportive learning environment (Xu, 2017, p. 60).

Another example of the student experience and its relationship to the economic forces of VUCA comes from a 2017 article on the student journey. The author writes “a re-conceptualisation of transition and the student experience away from a definition with the institution at its centre to one where the student journey is prioritized” is at the heart of his recommendation (Farenga, 2017, p. 152). In his study, “focus groups allowed students to reimagine the support they could receive in light of their own unique journeys” (Farenga, 2017, p.153). He writes that placing the student experience at a success program's core provides it flexibility in meeting student needs (Farenga, 2017, p.153). He adds “by being reactive in its offerings, students can curate their own support, helping them to continue developing their own personal higher education journeys” (Farenga, 2017, p.153). And lastly, from Sarah Cox and Ryan Naylor at La Trobe University (LTU) in Melbourne, Australia, their case study on LTU's S@LT, “Succeed at La Trobe” transition and academic outreach model details the results of this program “as a pedagogical model of response to the changing HE environment” (2018, p.52). They write that the program “may be particularly important to those from non-traditional or first-in family backgrounds, or those facing educational, financial or mental wellbeing issues (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p. 52).

The authors write:

S@LT has been central to La Trobe's Success and Retention Strategy for three years, and remains aligned with LTU's new five-year Strategic Plan 2018-2022, with the aim of increasing student success, retention and overall satisfaction. The S@LT program, through its multiple activities and achievements, demonstrates a significant role in improving student success and retention and a positive satisfaction impact regarding student experience at La Trobe" (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p.52).

Their program is steeped in partnerships with academic disciplines to provide personalized, course-and subject-specific academic supports (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p.52). In their 2017 study, "S@LT placed nearly 12,600 calls to 14,700 flagged students identified as at-risk through its subject-based and early intervention campaigns" (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p.57). They contacted over 5,000 students and sent over 6,000 emails to check-in and provide key information to students (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p. 57). They found that "two-thirds (66.5%) of student referrals were to online resources or college teachings staff to assist with these issues, plus another 9.8%...were referred to Student Learning staff or peer learning advisors for academic literacy help" (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p. 57). They conclude by indicating that "the high proportion of these referrals made suggest that many 'traditional' students also had problems with these areas" (Cox & Naylor, 2018, p. 58).

Xu's argument for faculty and administration to engage in the student experience, Farenga's argument to prioritize the student journey with flexible programming, and Cox & Naylor's conclusion that their retention efforts serves both non-traditional and traditional students is significant; it means that student experience programming can be both an economic and cultural response to VUCA forces, both domains that Stewart et al. recognize as challenges

for HE (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 244). Engaging in the student experience thoughtfully, therefore, is an ideal response for HE and could be why so many institutions are focusing on this area as a cultural qualifier and as a response to the economics of losing a student.

## **Conclusion**

Stewart et al. explain that HE's fiscal crisis in North America has "created an environment that is undermining the ability of institutions to resist change and to keep its hallowed traditions" (2016, p. 243). In addition, they write "while some industries benefit from economies of scale...in service sectors, where the service is provided by people (such as teaching) there are very real limits to the ability to scale without a significant diminution in quality" (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 246). The need for a fundamental shift in perspectives of what is an educational institution may point to the invigoration of the student experience in HE. HE faces very real economic challenges related to government funding and the incapacity to scale without severely impacting quality. The relationship between the student experience and the forces of VUCA is important because not only do HE institutions need to participate in a competitive marketplace, but the activation of the student experience as a key focus in HE also speaks to meeting the needs of changing student demographics and the fiscal imperative to see students persist to graduation. A signature student experience may be an essential institutional cultural differentiator for competing in the HE marketplace. Responding to the cultural and economic pressures of VUCA with a focus on the student experience is a vital opportunity that, based on the research, is one worth examining and likely investing in for educational leaders.

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