Would you like to improve first year student retention?

If yes, you may be interested in joining one of the following initiatives:

1. The VC’s award winning initiative ‘Track and Connect’ is a partnership between first year coordinators in faculties and staff in Student Support Services to identify and personally support students at risk of withdrawing.

Using historical data, Student Services has found that students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds, of low socioeconomic status, first in their family to attend university, or lack assumed knowledge for their course (e.g. advanced maths) tend to be more at risk. Further, the educational research literature points to low initial engagement as an at risk indicator.

In ‘Track and Connect’, students at risk of dropping out on the basis of background factors are flagged upon enrolment using information held by Student Services. First year coordinators in the faculties provide on-time engagement data such as early assessment results, class attendance, and Learning Management System (LMS) access. Flagged first year students showing low initial engagement are put on a priority list and phoned at crucial points throughout semester (census data, discontinue not fail data, and Week 13) by senior students trained by Counselling and Psychological Services staff. These senior students are able to provide personal support throughout first semester, and provide links to additional academic and personal resources and services to make the transition to university smoother.

In Science and Engineering and IT, the results of the program have been impressive, with retention rates increasing and failure rates decreasing!

Here’s what one of the senior students has to say about it:

“As a student who wasn’t aware of support systems offered by the uni in first year and had to actively seek them out, knowing other students were bound to be in a similar position is what first drew me to the program… I’ve had students feel completely overwhelmed and cry on the phone, as well as those that are very stoic but once you offer them information on support systems, are keen to know more. Regardless of their different individual circumstances, all students I’ve spoken to have ended the call feeling more confident than they started. One particular thing I’ve noticed is that there’s almost a stigma around seeking help, especially with first year students keen to be independent and figure things out on their own, but T&C goes a long way in normalizing accessing...
If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Ana Munro. You may also like to read a recent interview with the team published in Staff News.

2. The First Year Experience Network is a long-standing and active group of academic and professional staff from across the University that works together to develop and share strategies for supporting first year students and innovations for teaching large and diverse cohorts. If you’re teaching first year units of study, you’ll find their website resources very helpful. If you’re interested in being involved in the group, or attending the events they host, send an email to the coordinator Associate Professor Adam Bridgeman.