Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in Learning: New insights from research

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Goals articulated by Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Dean of Indigenous Education, University of Adelaide:

• Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation
• Engaging in inclusive curriculum renewal

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The Project

• Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)

• 526 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students

• Large Indigenous sample, significant results
Quiz

Compared to non-Indigenous students, do you think Indigenous students at our universities are likely to be:

1. More, or less engaged than non-Indigenous students?

2. More, or less likely to complete their courses?

3. More, or less positive about the support provided by their institution?
Engagement and Completion: An anomaly?

- “Indigenous students are engaged with learning at a similar or higher level than their non-Indigenous peers, and report levels of overall satisfaction equal to, or higher than, their non-Indigenous peers.

- Indigenous students are more likely to seriously consider leaving their institution, and continue to be less likely to complete than their peers.”

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
The ‘Overlap Effect’

“Indigenous students with the following attributes have higher departure intentions:

• students whose circumstances qualify them for financial assistance;
• students who are studying externally or at a distance;
• students from a provincial or remote area;
• students with a disability;
• older students; and
• male students.”

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
What students may **not** choose to talk about

- “... the burdensome ‘overlap effect’ of characteristics associated in the literature with non-completion: factors such as poor health, disability, financial stress, caring for dependents and studying off-campus - added to which are the pressures and distress caused by high mortality and incarceration rates in some communities.”

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, In press)
Academic and Non-academic Support

“Most Indigenous students feel that their institution provides ‘quite a bit’ of or ‘very much’ support for them to succeed academically…

Indigenous students feel that there is far less support provided by their institution to help them cope with their non-academic responsibilities than their non-Indigenous peers do.”

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
Indigenous students’ ratings of the extent to which their institution emphasises various types of support (N=526)

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
Indigenous students' ratings of how much their institution provides support to help them succeed academically

- Very little: 6.4%
- Some: 29.7%
- Quite a bit: 41.4%
- Very much: 22.5%

(N=526)

Indigenous students' ratings of how much their institution helps them cope with non-academic responsibilities

- Very little: 8.2%
- Some: 16.2%
- Quite a bit: 34%
- Very much: 41.6%

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
What have we learnt?

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are highly engaged
• Most succeed, but non-completion is a worry
• Non-completion often relates to overlapping factors
• Support (or lack of it) is linked to departure decisions
• Academic support is noted and appreciated
• Non-academic support may need expanding
A Final Question for You

• What can we do differently, or better, to maximise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement and success?


THANK YOU

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