

# BRIDGING THE CULTURAL DIVIDE HELPS STUDENT RETENTION

## ELITE EDUCATION & POPULAR CULTURE



# UPPER MIDDLE BOGANS @ STUDY

ABC FREE TO AIR TV THURSDAY NIGHTS

A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES OF STUDENTS STUDYING BACHELOR COMMUNITY AND HUMAN SERVICES IN WESTERN SYDNEY



# HO HO HO SEASONS GREETINGS FROM US & OUR STUDENTS



## WHERE WE COME FROM.... GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY

- Blacktown LGA 340,000 people
- Greater Western Sydney over 2 million
- A primary location for refugee resettlement in Sydney
- Highest urban Aboriginal population in NSW
- Contains some suburbs with highest social disadvantage in Australia (Vinson 2007)
- Less than one third of the LGA population hold any post school qualifications
- Our day cohort consists of students who usually have just completed a TAFE diploma
- Our night cohort consists of workers who need to improve their qualifications

# OUR TOP 4 SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

- being the first in the family to undertake tertiary study
- being immersed in popular 'bogan' culture
- having poor reading and writing skills
- being engrossed in a struggle for economic & emotional survival



# BEING THE FIRST TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY

“i’m the first to go to tafe and now uni...i don’t think i can do this...” – a txt message from our students

Personal confidence that you can be successful in tertiary student is a primary barrier for our students.

# BEING A BOGAN ...

- Being a bogan means you are constantly looking on Facebook for black and white answers proposed by your friends to the worlds problems. And if people don't agree with you and your friends – watch out its war!
- Reactionary learners with poor emotional intelligence and lack of critical thinking skills is where many of our students start their Fed Uni experience
- This is a very slippery barrier to climb over and it can easily exhaust good lectures and students

# DON'T READ DON'T WRITE

- Our students don't read and while some have surprisingly good writing skills most don't
- Lack of these skills is a constant confidence drainer
- Failing assessments for lack of logical flow and reasoned argument is devastating & essential for setting a standard for professional writing skills
- Teaching students to read in a discerning manner is essential to ensure they can identify key points in an expedient way.



# PERSONAL SURVIVAL!

- For our students work comes first as it puts a roof over their heads, food on the table and petrol in the car to get to uni
- Next is family because even though many want a divorce it will cost too much and make things harder...
- Then comes uni which is time out from the real world

# REMOVING THE BARRIERS - WHAT HAS WORKED FOR US

- STUDENT CENTRED CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICE
- STUDENT CENTRED TUTORIAL SUPPORT SERVICE
- STUDENT STUDY CENTRE WITH STUDENT MENTORS
- THESE RESPONSES HAVE GROWN ORGANICALLY FROM TRIAL AND ERROR

# STUDENT CENTRED CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICE

- Students want the institution (represented by their lectures) to care about them – because no one else does!
- Lectures (all casual staff) want the institution to care about them because no one else does!
- Studying and working in isolation is depressing after a while – we all need someone to care about us and that person is the WSI course co-ordinator who runs a case management service
- Case management service means you need to be available during the semester 24/5 ready to do anything for anyone which most commonly is:
  - ✓ have a cuppa and spending time you don't have listening to students and staff,
  - ✓ adding to your work load by marking other lecturers student papers which have extensions
  - ✓ Buying morning or afternoon tea for staff
  - ✓ Dropping in food to the student centre

## STUDENT CENTRED TUTORIAL SUPPORT - MENTORING IN ACADEMIC READING AND WRITING

- “Want to get good marks use the tutors” is a constant reframe from students responding to others who moan about their marks.
- As student progress through their academic program many say they have a ‘favourite’ tutor who understands them and makes them feel confident.
  - ✓ tutors act as mentors for development of critical thinking skills
  - ✓ tutors have to be available in person either before or after class as students most students can’t afford to allocate extra uni days to see tutors
  - ✓ Fostering friendly competition with the Fed Uni Wall of Fame for successful students

## STUDENT STUDY CENTRE – DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING CULTURE

- “I start talking about something i’ve learnt at uni with me family or friends outside and fair dinkum they think i’m a wanka.” (Steve 2016)
- Being the first and living in bogan territory makes learning and practicing high level thinking difficult.
  - ✓ students need a place to digest ideas, mull over assessment tasks, debate various understandings of concepts & whinge about how stressed they are & how bad their lectures are at explaining things.
  - ✓ what started as a centre with a kitchen and free wifi became a home room and hangout space....

# EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS OF THESE STRATEGIES...

## FED UNI WALL OF FAME

- In semester 2 2016, 9 students out of a cohort of 53 received a congratulations letter for excellent results from the Arts Ed Faculty Dean.
  - ✓ a special morning tea is held each semester & students are presented with a framed copy of this letter and their photo is hung on the wall of fame in the student centre.
  - ✓ students who appear on the wall encourage others to make the effort to get their photo up.
- During 2 years of operation the BCHS 23 letters for academic excellence have been received from the Dean, 2 students have received Golden Key invitation letters and 2 students have received letters inviting them to the ASK program.
- So far 27 letters hang on the Fed Uni Wall of Fame and the diverse backgrounds of the recipients – indigenous, recently arrived migrant, sole parent mother, sole parent father, past university drop out, students simultaneously working and studying full time is an indication of the success of the above mentioned strategies.
- However this is a dynamic space and every semester it is important to review your student cohort and make adjustments to meet their needs.

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