



TIES: Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme

Large Grant Application Form: Teaching Improvement Progress Report¹

Project Title

First Year Experience Working Group 2007 Project

\$ Amount Awarded

\$20,000

\$ Amount Expended

\$18,750

Brief Project Description

The First Year Experience Working Group (FYEWG) was established by the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) in 2000, as part of a University-wide initiative to improve the learning experience of first year students, in light of the strategic goal to attract and support high achieving students and to improve retention rates. Since the beginning of 2006, the FYEWG has become a University working group that is affiliated with but independent from the ITL.

The 2007 FYEWG project had two main objectives:

1. to ensure the ongoing work of the FYEWG and to enhance collaboration with the SWOT Project Group. This was to be achieved by
 - reports on the work of each group exchanged at meetings;
 - continuing the initiative begun in 2006 of inviting to each FYEWG meeting a colleague from one of the key service / support units to share about an aspect of their work with first years, with discussion of how this work can support and be supported by the work of the group.
 - continuing the initiative begun in 2006 of holding an annual open forum on an aspect of the first year experience, with participation from colleagues from faculties, members of the SWOT Project Group and others involved in student services related to first year support.
2. to promote the development of foundation generic skills among first year students and awareness of their role in the development of generic graduate attributes. This was to be achieved by
 - organising a open forum on good practice in promoting the development of generic graduate attributes among first year students (Semester 2, 2007);
 - facilitating the sharing of online resources aimed at developing foundation generic skills, with attention to utilising and, if necessary, modifying these resources in contextually appropriate ways.

¹ This form is to be sent to the Executive Officer (Learning and Teaching) by the closing date of the applications for 2007 TIES Grants.

Progress to date

The First Year Experience Working Group held four meetings in 2007, the last of these taking the form of a university-wide Forum – ‘Graduate Attributes and First Years: A Good Practice Forum’.

The group includes members from all faculties with first year undergraduate programs, from the ITL, the Counselling Service, the Learning Centre, the University of Sydney Library, Yooroang Garang Discipline of Indigenous Health Studies, and the International Student Services Unit.

2007 meetings were held on the following dates:

- Friday 16 February
- Friday 11 May
- Friday 17 August
- Friday 9 November (Forum)

If Project completed, list project outcomes

The 2007 FYEWG project had two main objectives:

1. *To ensure the ongoing work of the FYEWG and to enhance collaboration with the SWOT Project Group.*
 - The First Year Experience Working Group continued to strengthen its relationship with the SWOT Project Group, through regular communication. A report from the FYEWG is now a standing item on the Agenda for SWOT Project Group meetings.
 - The FYEGW continued the initiative of inviting to each meeting a colleague from one of the key administration, service, and support units to share about an aspect of their work with first years, with discussion of how this work can support and be supported by the work of the group. The invited guests in 2007 were:
 - Anne Fernandez, (Timetabling Coordinator, Student Centre). Anne spoke to the group about services available from the Timetabling Unit, focussing in particular on a number of other aspects of the work of the Timetabling Unit that are of relevance to first year coordinators.
 - Jordi Austin (Head, Counselling Service) and Charlotte Long (Welfare Research Manager, SRC). Jordi and Charlotte both gave presentations on the particular difficulties experienced by first year students.
 - Simon Barrie (Associate Director, Institute for Teaching and Learning). Simon spoke on the work that has been done by the ITL’s Generic Graduate Attributes Working Party, specifically in relation to first year students. This presentation acted as a catalyst for discussion about the structure and focus of the upcoming Forum.
2. *To promote the development of foundation generic skills among first year students and awareness of their role in the development of generic graduate attributes.*
 - On November 9 2007 the First Year Experience Working Group held our annual University-wide Forum on an aspect of the first year experience. ‘Graduate Attributes and First Years: A Good Practice Forum’ was organized around each of the five clusters of graduate attributes and their relevance to the first year context. Each session began with a stimulus presentation, followed by small group discussion, and then a facilitated discussion involving the entire group. The Forum was well-attended, with sixty colleagues from throughout the university attending throughout the day. The following Faculties/Units were represented:

Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Faculty of Arts; Faculty of Economics and Business; Faculty of Education and Social Work; Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies; Faculty of Health Sciences; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Pharmacy; Faculty of Science; Faculty of Veterinary Science; Conservatorium of Music; Sydney College of the Arts; Koori Centre; Yooroang Garang Faculty of Health Sciences; Institute for Teaching and Learning; International Student Support Unit; Equity Support Services; Learning Centre; The College Sydney Project; SciTech Libraries; Sydney College of the Arts Library; Fisher Library; Health Sciences Library.

- The FYEWG has continued to facilitate the sharing of online resources aimed at developing foundation generic skills, with attention to utilising and, if necessary, modifying these resources in contextually appropriate ways. The 'eSearch to Research Library Skills Tutorial', developed by the Library in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts has been adapted and extended so that alternative versions are available to students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, The Faculty of Education & Social Work and the Faculty of Law.

List any publications or seminar/conferences reporting on this project

N/A at this stage.

What is the next step? How may project be replicated and best practice spread across the University?

In 2008 the First Year Experience Working Group will continue to work to improve the learning experience of first year students, in light of the strategic goal to attract and support high achieving students and to improve retention rates.

The 2008 First Year Experience Working Group (FYEWG) Project will have two main goals:

1. To deepen our understanding of commencing first years at the University of Sydney, in particular regarding (a) their expectations as they begin their degree programs, and (b) their reflections on their experiences at the end of the first year. This outcome will contribute to supporting student-centred teaching, and will be achieved by
 - conducting a survey of first year students in at least four faculties at the beginning of S1 2008, designed to gain insight into students' hopes, concerns and expectations about studying at university, and sharing the findings of this research in the 2008 First Year Experience Working Group annual open forum;
 - creating a context for strong and vocal participation of first year students themselves in this open forum, with opportunities for students to reflect and give feedback on their experiences of the first year at Sydney in relation to their original expectations.
2. To work with both first year students and their teachers to promote a conception of foundation generic skills and generic graduate attributes as key outcomes of their whole university experience. Developing these attributes takes place in the units of study in their degree programs and in their university life beyond the classroom. This outcome will be achieved by
 - facilitating the sharing of relevant resources developed by the Generic Graduate Attributes Strategic Working Group of the Institute for Teaching and Learning (2002 – 2007) through members of the FYEWG and a broader network of colleagues established through the 2007 annual open forum.
 - facilitating the sharing of further resources aimed at developing foundation generic skills, with attention to integrating these resources into first year units of study and complementary foundation programs. Such resources include the 'Academic Honesty Module', designed by the Faculty of Economics & Business, the 'eSearch to Research Library Skills Tutorial', developed by the Library in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts, and the 'WriteSite', created by USyd eLearning, the Learning Centre and the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculties.

Through the development of a First Year Experience Working Group website, we will document the aims, methodology and findings of our research on first year students' expectations (Goal 1 above), so that our experiences can be disseminated to other colleagues throughout the University. The website will also form a portal through which we will share relevant resources aimed at developing foundation generic skills (Goal 2 above), and other resources relevant to those colleagues working with first year students.

Project Representative

Name	Dr Nerida Jarkey
Signature	

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