

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

POLICY

ACADEMIC ORIENTATION

(A program to support the academic introduction of new students to the University)

LEGISLATION

There is no University legislation which is directly relevant to this matter.

POLICY

The University's plan was approved by Academic Board in October 1998 (full text AB98/173 Attachment 1) in support of the University's mission to:

“retain students able to benefit from a university education”

and outlines a commitment to enhance the quality of first year teaching and learning by facilitating the academic induction and orientation of first-year students. Academic orientation is defined to include processes that induct students to University study prior to enrolment, at entry and throughout first year. A summary version of the plan is reproduced.

The objectives of the Plan are:

To familiarise students with the University by:

- introducing them to the physical environment;
- explaining academic culture; and
- promoting the wider student support services of the University's campuses, including Language and Academic Skills support, the Libraries, Information Technology Services, Financial Aid, Health and Careers and Counselling Services.

To develop students' sense of purpose and direction by:

- promoting a clear understanding of why they are doing their subjects and courses, and where the subjects and courses are directed, whether the students are enrolled in liberal or professional programs; and
- promoting a clear understanding of the aims and objectives, learning outcomes, learning processes, assessment methods, and teaching and learning methods of their subjects and courses.

To facilitate students' engagement by:

- promoting involvement in university life, including engagement with their peers; and
- supporting students to stay on in their subjects and courses.

To promote and enhance students' learning by:

- developing basic skills and knowledge of their field of study;

- developing generic skills such as group work, oral and written communication, research and referencing; and
- taking into account the variation of skills and experience that students come with and, where necessary, raising skills and knowledge to a basic level by addressing deficiencies, and extending skills and knowledge in students.

PROCEDURE

- 1 Each faculty of the University has prepared a faculty plan which often emphasises issues such as independent learning, group work and the availability of support services. In particular the role of first year/subject/course co-ordinators is acknowledged in leadership of casual staff and first-year teaching and providing a point of reference to other support units. Co-ordinators should be experienced and able teachers who can promote teaching quality.
- 2 A central University plan for campus-based initiatives has also been compiled. This is particularly important at regional campuses and includes university experience programs, preparing for study programs, open day programs, enrolment processes, orientation week welcomes and academic programs, student services and residential colleges academic support programs.
- 3 The plan was implemented during 1999 – 2001 with longer-term initiatives put in place.
- 4 Strategies to support first-year students should be widely shared (eg by Academic Services Managers of faculties) and University support services should be widely advertised.

PRACTICE

Faculties have incorporated various initiatives into their plans including:

- 1 Orientation Leaders (students);
- 2 Course information lectures;
- 3 Academic Orientation Programs;
- 4 Mentoring by experienced students;
- 5 Facilitating student mixing, peer support;
- 6 Improving academic and administrative advice;
- 7 Enrolment support;
- 8 Academic skills assistance and courses;
- 9 English language assistance;
- 10 Identification and counselling of students at risk;
- 11 Guides to assessment;
- 12 Ensuring assessment is appropriate;
- 13 Information on referencing and plagiarism; and

14 Orientation for second-year studies.

A full outline of initiatives both central (campus) and faculty is outlined in AB98/173 Attachment 1.

COMMENT

- 1 Faculties have accepted the importance of good academic orientation in the retention of students, but noted some concern about resources. In particular the additional demands on first-year staff could be significant.
- 2 The acceptance of students from a wide variety of backgrounds places an obligation on the University to facilitate the assimilation of these students.
- 3 It has been suggested that particular attention needs to be given where some knowledge is assumed in the absence of prerequisites or at least where some of the students have some background.
- 4 The unequal distribution of computer skills may require particular attention.
- 5 The University's supplementary assessment policy is a useful adjunct to academic orientation as it allows students the opportunity to catch-up modest failings in first-year.
- 6 Students who enrol mid-year miss out on some of the support mechanisms envisaged.
- 7 International students may require additional support and while the International Programs Office has staff to support the welfare needs of these students, the students and needs may not be identified.
- 8 It has been suggested that Web-based re-enrolment removes another point of contact with students. Other means of support for the transition from first-year to second-year could be investigated.
- 9 It has been suggested that timetable inflexibility and changes make it difficult for some students to continue.
- 10 The Academic Development Unit has suggested that a greater attempt be made to assist students to get to know other students. In this respect the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences conducted an interesting pilot in taking three discipline groups of students to Beechworth in 1999 for a series of activities.

ADG

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