

## Student Engagement Strategy 2009

Student engagement can be defined as participation or involvement in academic or extracurricular activities which lead to high quality learning<sup>1</sup>.

A core priority of the Strategic Plan (2008-2012) is to; *establish a student experience program to improve employability and develop the skills and understanding of rounded citizens.*

La Trobe University has responded to this through the establishment of a unit within the portfolio of the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Equity and Student Services to contribute to the planning and implementation of programs, activities and strategies that build a vibrant, formative and engaging university experience.

Objective	Strategy	Timeline	Performance Indicators
Develop a coherent and structured approach to maximising student engagement and enrichment.	Infinity Leadership Program implemented as a Pilot program in 2009, and extended to all campuses by 2010	Launched Feb 2009	Consolidated student engagement offerings in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International or local voluntary /community work</li> <li>• Student mentoring and leadership programs</li> <li>• For credit Work Integrated Learning</li> </ul>
	Student Leaders Program implemented across all campuses in 2009 to provide training and recognition for student participation in mentoring and volunteering	Launched July 2009	

Objective	Strategy	Timeline	Performance Indicators
Improve student retention by creating opportunities for first year students to successfully transition into University life	Audit and improve processes and procedures relating to student admission, enrolment, orientation and academic engagement	March- June 2009	Student retention exceeds 86 per cent
	Enhance staff awareness of first year transition issues with establishment of website and resources	March- June 2009	
	Launch Peer Mentoring Toolkit and Network and support the implementation of new Peer Mentoring programs within faculties	Launched Semester 1/ 09	
	Review and refine Orientation policies and programming to ensure students are better prepared and have access to a common La Trobe experience	July- Dec 09	

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
Improve La Trobe University's internal knowledge of and capabilities for enhancing student engagement	Maintain University-wide Student Engagement and Advisory Committee to develop policies and disseminate information and resources	Ongoing	Increased response rates to AUSSE, GDS/CEQ, Student Services Survey, SET
	Implement a Staff Symposium on Student Engagement featuring guest speakers and best practice	July 09	Indicators of student learning and engagement from CEQ and AUSSE show sustained improvement.
	Develop program on the 'Student Voice' and ensure relevant data is collected through student focus groups, Student Summit, AUSSE	Ongoing	

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
Enhance the University's community engagement by increasing the participation of students within the community	Implement Infinity Leadership Program across all campuses to provide a framework for student-community engagement	Semester 2 2009	Increased student participation in community engagement activities
	Prepare students through effective training and recognise their contribution as volunteers through the Student Leaders framework		New partnerships established with local schools, community and industry to support student volunteering
	Create opportunities for school students and young people within community services to participate in Infinity Leadership Program and aspects of the Student Leaders programs		

<sup>1</sup> Coates, H. (2006). *Student Engagement in Campus-based and Online Education*. New York: Routledge.

## **Initiatives 2009-2011:**

### **Infinity Leadership Program**

Inspired by the highly regarded Manchester University Leadership program, the Infinity Leadership Program will be a highly aspirational, academic and experience based program targeting final year and postgraduate students. The program will feature a semester of academic coursework around leadership issues- within society, the environment and the workplace while providing students with tools and opportunities to develop their own leadership abilities. The second semester will allow participants the opportunity to put those skills to the test with a University, community or workplace based activity which will be showcased as part of their assessment. The program will be a high profile, quality program for the University. The pilot program was launched in September and will commence in semester 1 /2009. It is envisioned that this program will attract a high level of external sponsorship and funding in future years, however it needs to be fully funded for 2009 to be successful.

### **Student Leaders Program**

Students already contribute to University life through a wide range of activities, clubs, societies and programs, and many other students have great ideas that they are unsure about putting into practice. The Student Leaders program will support the efforts of students through training, mentoring, support and recognition while creating a framework for future student leaders to get involved. Activities might include Peer Mentoring, environmental projects, arts and cultural events, health and wellbeing activities, personal development and social events. The program will allow participants to add to their academic achievements through accredited training (i.e., Certificate II Communication Skills) to be recognized on a supplementary testamur. The opportunity for students to enhance their employability skills and personal development through their participation in building a vibrant campus life and professional training well recognized by future employers is a unique opportunity for La Trobe to offer future students across all campuses. With the employment of a Student Training Officer, this program could feasibly commence in Semester 2/ 2009.

### **Student Engagement Forum**

The Forum will be an opportunity for La Trobe to identify ways to continue to explore and enrich the educational experience of our students. Hosted in partnership with ACER, the Forum will be held 2 July 2009. Professor George Kuh, a respected practitioner and researcher in student engagement from the US will be visiting Australia at this time and will be the keynote speaker, which will cover areas of evidence based student engagement and best practice across the sector.

### **Student Voice**

A campaign for students to provide their feedback and input on a number of key themes and to present recommendations for building a successful La Trobe into the future. To be held as a series of focus groups with a key event in early 2009 themes may include:

- Transition and the first year experience
- Curriculum renewal
- The student experience/ building a student community
- The campus environment

The AUSSE survey will continue to be administered through the Student Engagement unit providing data on the impact the level of engagement of La Trobe students, and mechanisms to utilise the data for improvement. A student newsletter will also be developed and produced by the Student Engagement team to provide the University as a whole with information about student activities and successes across all campuses.

### **La Trobe website**

The Student Engagement team continue to explore ways to make the student-site more accessible and useful to students to ensure accurate and quality information and resources are provided. A new staff page will be online in March which will include links to best practice, La Trobe initiatives and resources. A new postgraduate student site is being created to give coursework students in particular a 'home' online. The team will also continue the ongoing work of updating and renewing sites.

## **Progress on Implementation – 2008**

1. Infinity Leadership Program launched, with 30 students from Bundoora and Bendigo registered, representing each faculty, postgraduate and undergraduate, international and domestic. Presenters include distinguished Alumni, business and community leaders and La Trobe academics, including the Vice-Chancellor
2. Planning underway to implement the Student Leader's program, providing training, mentoring and promotion of student driven activities
3. Regional Student Engagement Officer appointed to work with regional campuses, industry and community to extend mentoring, leadership and volunteering programs. RSE has visited most campuses to map current areas of strength and identify opportunities for new initiatives.
4. Bendigo Advantage program (a transition support program) implemented in semester 2, and to be established again for semester 1 2009, alongside a CD-Rom toolkit for new students
5. AUSSE Survey (Student Engagement) administered across University- 1,389 responses
6. Student Engagement webpages live, to promote and support student engagement initiatives to students and staff, and management of content for all Current Students website ([www.latrobe.edu.au/students/student-engagement](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/student-engagement) )
7. Creation of a 'New to La Trobe' website which provides essential information and resources for commencing students, to be live by December. ([www.latrobe.edu.au/transition](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/transition) )
8. New Orientation and Transition policies drafted and awaiting approval
9. Peer Mentoring Toolkit to be finalised and distributed by March 2009
10. Student Engagement Advisory Committee to become policy development committee reporting to Academic Committee