

THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE
AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
IN 2007

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Acknowledgements

This study is based upon previous national studies of the first year experience undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). The CSHE has undertaken three such studies: in 1994, 1999 and 2004. The most recent study resulted in the publication of a comparative analysis of all three, *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies* by Kerri-Lee Krause, Robyn Hartley, Richard James and Craig McInnis (2005). That report was the outcome of a project funded by the Higher Education Innovations Programme of the Department of Education, Science and Training.

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
List of Tables	4
Introduction	5
1.1 Overview.....	5
1.2 The survey method and questionnaire	5
1.3 Enrolment characteristics of the sample	6
1.4 Demographic characteristics of the sample	6
2. Aspirations, change and uncertainty in the first year	8
2.1 Reasons for enrolling	8
2.2 Sense of purpose.....	8
2.3 Prior to enrolment in 2007.....	9
2.3.1 Previous study.....	9
2.3.2 Course preference	9
2.3.3 Deferral of enrolment	10
2.4 Change and uncertainty	10
2.4.1 Course and enrolment changes	10
2.4.2 Withdrawal from subjects	11
2.4.3 Thinking about deferring	11
3 Student expectations and adjustments to university study	13
3.1 Adjusting to university assessment and standards	13
3.3 Adjusting to the first year	13
3.3.1 The school to university transition	13
3.3.2 Academic orientation	14
3.3.3 Academic application	14
3.5 Other adjustment issues	15
4 Engaging with learners and learning at university.....	16
4.1 How students spend their time	16
4.2 Measures of student engagement in the first year	17
4.2.2 Engaging with academic staff and other students	18
4.2.3 Engaging with the learning environment	19
4.2.4 Engaging through on-line technologies	20
5 Managing commitments in the first year.....	21
5.1 Sources of Income.....	21
5.2 Students in paid work.....	21
5.2.1 Hours of paid work.....	21
5.2.2 Reasons for undertaking paid work.....	22
5.3 Comprehending and coping.....	22
5.4 Accessing support services.....	23
6 Perceptions of teaching and satisfaction with courses.....	24
6.1 Perceptions of teaching in the first year.....	24
6.2 Perceptions of course overall.....	25
Summary and conclusion	26
6.1 Aspirations, change and uncertainty in the first year.....	26
6.2 Student expectations and adjustments to university study	26
6.3 Engaging with learners and learning at university	26
6.4 Managing commitments in the first year	27
6.5 Perceptions of teaching and satisfaction with courses.....	27
6.7 Other themes.....	27
Appendix 1 Survey instrument.....	28

List of Tables

Table 1.2	Respondent enrolment characteristics (percentages).....	6
Table 1.1	Respondent demographic characteristics (percentages).....	7
Table 2.1	Reasons for enrolling (percentage important or very important)	8
Table 2.2	Sense of purpose (percentage agree or strongly agree):.....	9
Table 2.3	Percentage who have undertaken previous study	9
Table 2.4	Preference given to current course on application (percentage).....	9
Table 2.5	Deferrals, and reason for deferral; consideration of deferral, and reasons for deciding against deferral; withdrawals (percentage)	10
Table 2.6	Changes made after first enrolling this year (percentage)	10
Table 2.7	Changes intended for next year (percentage).....	11
Table 2.8	Percentage who have withdrawn from one or more subjects in 2006, and average number of units withdrawn from	11
Table 2.9	Percentage of students who thought seriously about discontinuing/deferring during first semester; and reason given (percentage important or very important reason):	12
Table 2.10	Reasons for deciding not to defer (percentage important or very important)	12
Table 3.1	Average grade in first semester and expectations of grades	13
Table 3.2	Transition from secondary school to university (percentage agree or strongly agree)	14
Table 3.3	Academic orientation (percentage agree or strongly agree)	14
Table 3.4	Academic application (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	14
Table 3.5	Other selected adjustment issues (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	15
Table 4.1	Days per week (including evenings and half-days) typically spent on campus	16
Table 4.2	Average course contact hours (per week)	16
Table 4.3	A typical 7-day week during first semester. Average number of hours spent on selected tasks	16
Table 4.4	A typical day on campus. Average number of hours spent on selected activities.....	17
Table 4.5	Study and workload (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	17
Table 4.6	Indicators of student engagement (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	17
Table 4.7	Engagement with other students (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	18
Table 4.8	Frequency of shared tasks (percent answering 'frequently')	18
Table 4.9	Usefulness of various aspects of students' course or program (percentage useful or very useful)	18
Table 4.10	Connectedness (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	19
Table 4.11	Frequency of selected activities and actions (percent answering 'frequently').....	19
Table 4.12	Reasons for skipping class for those who sometimes or frequently skipped class (percent 'important' for each reason).....	19
Table 4.13	Access to computers and the internet (percent with such access).....	20
Table 4.14	Frequency of ICT use (percent answering at least weekly)	20
Table 4.15	Percentage requesting more on-line learning resources	20
Table 4.16	Usefulness of aspects of course or program (percentage useful or very useful).....	20
Table 5.1	Financial support for expenses (including course and ancillary fees) while at university. (Percentage only and main sources of support)	21
Table 5.2	Average hours of paid work undertaken per week	21
Table 5.3	Spread of hours of paid work per week (percentage).....	22
Table 5.4	Interference of paid work with academic performance (percentage).....	22
Table 5.5	Main reasons for doing paid work (percentage)	22
Table 5.6	Comprehending and coping (percentage agree or strongly agree).....	23
Table 5.7	Percentage of students who have used various services, and percentage of those users who found the service "very useful"	23
Table 5.8	Perceptions of teaching (percentage agree 2004 and 2007; percentage disagree 2007) ...	24
Table 5.9	"Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress" (percentage)	24
Table 5.10	Overall perception of course (percentage agree or strongly agree)	25

Introduction

1.1 Overview

This report discusses the findings of a survey of 900 first year students at La Trobe University undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE, University of Melbourne) in 2007. It discusses students aspirations and reasons for coming to university; how students cope with change and uncertainty in their first year; student's expectations, and the manner in which they adjust to university life; how students engage with other learners, with teachers, and with the learning environment; how students spend and manage their time, and, finally, their perceptions of teaching at university and their perceptions of their course overall.

This study of La Trobe University's first year students is based on previous national studies of the first year experience undertaken by the CSHE. The CSHE surveyed and reported on first year students in 1994, 1999 and 2004, with the most recent study resulting in the report *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies* by Kerri-Lee Krause, Robyn Hartley, Richard James and Craig McInnis (2005). That report was the outcome of a project funded by the Higher Education Innovations Programme of the Department of Education, Science and Training. The structure of the current report largely mirrors that of the 2004 national report for convenience of comparison.

Here, findings from the 2007 survey of La Trobe students are compared where possible to the findings for La Trobe students from the 2004 national survey. Because the two survey instruments were slightly different the two are not strictly directly comparable, however comparisons between the two can be taken as strongly indicative (as the frequent close correspondence between the two sets of findings demonstrates).

As part of the survey, students were asked about a number of demographic characteristics and where group characteristics appear to be strongly associated with particular findings we report these in the prose. The key characteristics analysed were: part-time and full-time status, sex, campus,¹ rurality, socio-economic status,² achievement level in first semester,³ those who speak a language other than English at home, school background,⁴ disability, age,⁵ and whether the student is the first in their immediate family to go to university.

1.2 The survey method and questionnaire

The survey instrument was a paper questionnaire which is included in Appendix 1 of this report. The questionnaire was based on that used for the CSHE's regular national surveys of first year students, the last of which was undertaken in 2004, but was modified somewhat to tailor it to the La Trobe cohort. The questionnaire was distributed by mail in late

¹ We compared Bundoora, Bendigo and 'other campuses.' Response numbers for campuses other than Bundoora and Bendigo were negligible.

² SES was measured according to parental university experience following the previous national studies.

³ 'Low achievers,' were classified as students whose average grade for first semester was 60% or less; 'high achievers' as those whose first semester grade was 71% or above.

⁴ Catholic, government, independent or overseas school.

⁵ 19 years and younger; 20 to 24 years; 25 years and older.

September/early October 2007 to all La Trobe's commencing first year students, both international and domestic, studying at each of the university's campuses: 6840 students in total.

Responses were gathered by reply-paid mail. There were 900 responses in total, with 50 questionnaires returned to sender, yielding a response rate of 13.25 per cent.

1.3 Enrolment characteristics of the sample

Most respondents (85.1 per cent) were enrolled in bachelors degrees, and just over 10 per cent were enrolled in combined bachelors degrees. 88.8 per cent of respondents were enrolled full-time, and most (68.7 per cent) paid fees using the deferred HECS-HELP scheme. Nearly three quarters of respondents (71.3 per cent) were studying at the Bundoora campus, with 17.7 per cent at Bendigo and very small numbers of respondents at other campuses.

Table 1.2 Respondent enrolment characteristics (percentages)

		2004	2007
Course type	Bachelors degree	87.5	85.1
	Combined Bachelors degree	8.2	10.1
	Combined Bachelors degree and diploma	0.4	1.0
	Undergraduate diploma	2.9	2.9
	Other	1.1	0.9
Campus of primary enrolment	Bundoora	-	71.3
	Melbourne city	-	0.3
	Bendigo	-	17.7
	Albury-Wodonga	-	5.3
	Mildura	-	3.1
	Shepparton	-	2.2
Faculty/School	Education	-	6.5
	Health Sciences	-	31.8
	Humanities and Social Sciences	-	25.5
	Science, Technology and Engineering	-	15.2
	Law and Management	-	21.0
Enrolment	Fulltime	94.0	88.8
	Part-time	6.0	11.3
Fee type	HECS-HELP up-front	20.4	20.0
	HECS-HELP deferred	69.8	68.7
	Overseas Fee-Paying International student	7.0	6.7
	Australian Fee-Paying student	1.4	2.3
	Other	1.4	2.4

1.4 Demographic characteristics of the sample

The average age of respondents was 22.86 years, with the mode of age groups falling in the 19 years and under range (48.4 per cent). Over three-quarters of the respondents were female, which is largely in line with other surveys: females tend to respond at greater rates than males. The vast majority (94.9 per cent) of respondents were Victorian, and slightly more than half (56.9 per cent) lived in an urban area. Most students (59.9 per cent) came from a low socio-economic status background (SES was measured using parental education levels following the method of the national studies). Over half of the respondents (58.2 per cent) lived with their parents or guardians. These and other respondent characteristics are set out in the table on the following page:

Table 1.1 Respondent demographic characteristics (percentages)

			<i>2004</i>	2007
Average age of respondents (years)			<i>20.88</i>	22.86
Age, grouped		19 yrs and under	-	48.4
		20-24	-	33.1
		25-29	-	6.3
		30 yrs and over	-	12.1
Age 20 and Over			30.6	51.6
Age 25 and Over			9.7	18.4
Sex		Female	<i>66.3</i>	77.3
		Male	<i>33.7</i>	22.7
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander			<i>1.0</i>	0.4
Citizenship		Australian	-	85.5
		Other	-	14.5
If born overseas, years lived in Australia		>2	-	34.7
		2-5	-	20.8
		6-10	-	12.5
		10+	-	31.9
State of origin		Victoria	-	94.9
		NSW	-	4.5
		Other	-	0.5
Locational background		Urban	-	56.9
		Rural	-	43.1
Language other than English spoken at home			<i>20.6</i>	21.6
Disability, impairment or long term medical condition			-	9.2
SES		High	<i>16.7</i>	16.3
		Medium	<i>22.3</i>	26.8
		Low	<i>61.0</i>	59.9
Highest parental education		Mother		
		Primary	<i>12.2</i>	11.2
		Secondary	<i>46.0</i>	43.7
		Diploma	<i>14.0</i>	14.7
		Degree	<i>19.8</i>	21.1
		Postgraduate	<i>7.9</i>	9.2
		Father		
		Primary	<i>11.9</i>	11.1
		Secondary	<i>49.6</i>	44.2
		Diploma	<i>9.8</i>	14.9
		Degree	<i>20.7</i>	18.1
		Postgraduate	<i>8.3</i>	11.6
First in family to attend university			<i>38.3</i>	39.2
Has dependents			<i>10.9</i>	13.3
School type		Catholic	<i>22.9</i>	23.0
		Government	<i>59.0</i>	55.9
		Independent/Private	<i>13.9</i>	17.3
		Overseas	<i>4.2</i>	3.9
Main type of accommodation during semester				
		Family/Guardians	<i>51.3</i>	58.2
University accommodation (colleges etc)			<i>22.3</i>	9.9
		Private board	<i>2.2</i>	3.9
Renting with friends or co-tenants			<i>16.4</i>	16.0
		Own house/unit/flat	<i>6.3</i>	9.3
		Presently homeless	<i>0.0</i>	0.0
		Other	<i>1.5</i>	2.6
Times changed accommodation since commencing university				
		Never	<i>61.9</i>	72.0
		Once	<i>30.6</i>	20.8
		Twice	<i>6.3</i>	5.2
		Three or more times	<i>1.1</i>	2.0
Since starting uni, have moved:		within Victoria	<i>33.3</i>	25.9
		Interstate	<i>7.5</i>	4.4
		Overseas	<i>4.1</i>	4.1

2. Aspirations, change and uncertainty in the first year

2.1 Reasons for enrolling

First year students at La Trobe have both practical and intellectual reasons for undertaking university education. Almost all (96.0 per cent) said that an important reason for going to university for them was to study in a field that interested them. Employment prospects were also an important factor: 90.3 per cent hoped to improve their job prospects by going to university, and 81.7 were undertaking training for a specific job. Both of these findings represented an increase in employment as an incentive for study since 2004. Those who were the first in their family to attend university were more likely to be training for a specific job (87.2 per cent) than those who were not the first in their family to go to university (78.1 per cent). On all job and interest factors set out in the table below, La Trobe students gave a more positive response than the national cohort did in the 2004 study.

Table 2.1 Reasons for enrolling (percentage important or very important)

	2004	2007
Studying in a field that really interests me	96.2	96.0
Developing my talents and creative abilities	74.0	77.1
Getting training for a specific job	74.7	81.7
Improving my job prospects	81.9	90.3
Expectations of my parents or family	23.9	25.9

Around one quarter of respondents were attending university due to expectations of their parents (in the 2004 national study, 30 per cent of students nationally said that family expectation were an important factor in their decision to go to university). Full-fee paying overseas students were the most likely to be undertaking study due to parental expectations at 58.6 per cent. There was also an interesting association between achievement and parental expectations. Those we have classified as ‘low achievers,’ students whose average grade for first semester was 60% or less, were far more likely to say that they were attending university due to parental expectations (40.3 per cent), while of high achievers (those whose first semester grade was 71% or above) only 23.2 per cent were following the expectations of their parents.

2.2 Sense of purpose

The CSHE’s national studies of the first year experience have demonstrated that adjustment to university is linked to having a clear direction and sense of purpose about going to university. Unsurprisingly, given the influence of personal and professional interests in the decision to study demonstrated above, most students (88.9 per cent) felt clearly about their reasons for going to university, and 71.7 per cent already knew the type of occupation they wanted. Only one in ten felt they were just marking time while deciding what to do in their lives.

Table 2.2 Sense of purpose (percentage agree or strongly agree):

	2004	2007
I am clear about the reasons I came to university	85.4	88.9
Studying at university is just marking time while I decide my future	14.9	10.5
I know the type of occupation I want	69.1	71.7

Again, achievement and sense of purpose were strongly associated. Only 5.8 per cent of high achievers felt university was just ‘marking time,’ but nearly one quarter (24.0 per cent) of low achievers were marking time while they decided their future.

2.3 Prior to enrolment in 2007

2.3.1 Previous study

More students than in 2004 had previously completed a university degree or diploma, a finding likely to be related to the increase in the number of students aged over 20 and over 25 since 2004 — indeed 39.8 per cent of those aged over 25 had previously completed a university degree or diploma. There was a decrease in the percentage who had previously undertaken a VET course, which is more difficult to explain. There were corresponding shifts in the percentage of students who had commenced but not completed a course previously.

Table 2.3 Percentage who have undertaken previous study

	2004	2007
Other tertiary education		
Completed a university degree/diploma course	16.3	22.3
Completed a university enabling course	7.6	2.0
Completed a VET course	37.0	24.3
Commenced but not completed a university degree/diploma	21.7	35.0
Commenced but not completed a VET course	6.5	3.0
Other	10.9	13.5

2.3.2 Course preference

The majority of students (63.5 per cent) gave La Trobe their first preference when applying for university, an increase of around 5 per cent on 2004. High achievers were more likely to have given La Trobe their first preference (69.2 per cent) than low achievers (49.1 per cent). Student from government schools (65.7 per cent) and low SES backgrounds (69.7 per cent) were also the most likely to give La Trobe their first preference and students from independent schools (53.0 per cent) and high SES backgrounds (54.3 per cent) were the least likely.

Table 2.4 Preference given to current course on application (percentage)

	2004	2007
First	58.3	63.5
Second	22.3	18.7
Third	7.4	8.8
Fourth	4.9	3.8
Other	7.1	5.2

2.3.3 Deferral of enrolment

A small proportion of students had previously deferred their enrolment. The most frequent reason given was financial, although among high SES students the most frequent reason was travel (38.1 per cent compared to 7.4 per cent for low SES students). SES and deferral rates were not strongly related.

Table 2.5 Deferrals, and reason for deferral; consideration of deferral, and reasons for deciding against deferral; withdrawals (percentage)

	2004	2007
Deferred enrolment last year	11.0	14.1
If so, main reason for deferring		
Financial		41.3
Health		8.3
Family responsibilities		5.5
Work		13.8
Travel		16.5
Study elsewhere		6.4
Other reason		8.3

High achievers were more likely to defer (15.0 per cent) than low achievers (8.1 per cent), and were more likely to give finances as the main reason (44.8 per cent) than were low achievers (14.3 per cent). It is worth noting that there was no strong association between SES and achievement.

2.4 Change and uncertainty

2.4.1 Course and enrolment changes

Changing courses, withdrawing and other changes, as well as thoughts of deferral, can all be associated with difficulty in adjusting to university, or of being uncertain about study direction.

Less than 10 per cent of students changed course in 2007, and only a very few changed institution. Those from independent schools (13.1 per cent), full-fee paying Australian students (15.0 per cent), low achievers (13.7 per cent) and part-timers (14.7 per cent) were the most likely to change courses. Low achievers (5.1 per cent) were the most likely to change institutions.

Table 2.6 Changes made after first enrolling this year (percentage)

	2004	2007
Changed course	8.1	9.4
Changed institution	3.9	3.0

Many more students hoped to make changes in their course or university in 2008 than had done so in 2007, though there was a drop in both having made a change previously and hoping to make a change in the next year over 2004 levels. Those aged 19 or under were much more likely (22.5 per cent) to hope to change courses than were those over 25 (8.1 per cent). Low achievers were more likely to want change (31.4 per cent) than high achievers (14.5 per cent). Full-fee paying Australian students were also keen to change courses (26.3 per cent). Planned institutional change was fairly stable across demographic groups with the

exception of rural students, who were the least likely to wish to change institutions (5.9 per cent).

Table 2.7 Changes intended for next year (percentage)

	2004	2007
Hope to change course	24.0	17.7
Hope to change institution	13.9	9.2

2.4.2 Withdrawal from subjects

Over all, 14.5 per cent of respondents had withdrawn from one or more subjects in 2007, with an average of between one and two subjects withdrawn from. Part-timers (29.2 per cent), low achievers (20.8 per cent) and students with disabilities (27.8 per cent) were the most likely to have withdrawn from subjects.

Table 2.8 Percentage who have withdrawn from one or more subjects in 2006, and average number of units withdrawn from

	2004	2007
Has withdrawn from one or more subjects/units this year	13.4	14.5
Number of units withdrawn from (per withdrawee)	1.77	1.82

2.4.3 Thinking about deferring

Deferral and discontinuation rates of first year students are a key concern of institutions across the sector. In 2004, the national study of first year students found that 27.6 per cent had thought about deferring; the corresponding figure for La Trobe in 2004 was 31.1 per cent. In 2007, there had been a small decrease in the percentage of students at La Trobe who had thought about deferring. Nearly one third of students (31.1 per cent) reported that they had seriously thought about deferring during 2007. As with those who had deferred in previous years (section 2.3.3 above), finances were an important reason (40.0 per cent), however the main reason given was emotional health, which was cited as important by 55.3 per cent of those who had thought of deferring (in 2004 the figure nationally was 52 per cent). One third reported that they simply disliked studying, and 38.8 per cent deferred or discontinued because they thought they might fail. Paid worker commitments (18.3 per cent) and having found employment (16.0 per cent) were the least cited reasons for considering deferral.

Rates of deferral/discontinuation were fairly similar across the various demographic cohorts, with the exception of international fee-paying students (10.9 per cent), who were comparatively unlikely to consider deferral, and low achievers, who were very likely to have considered deferral at 52.1 per cent. By way of comparison, only 23.2 per cent of high achievers had considered deferral. (Conversely, when students were asked if they *had* deferred their enrolment prior to 2007 — section 2.3.3 above — low achievers were *less* likely to have deferred than high achievers.)

The complexity of reasons associated with considering deferral suggests that interview-based research may be a useful approach to finding out more about this problem.

Table 2.9 Percentage of students who thought seriously about discontinuing/deferring during first semester; and reason given (percentage important or very important reason):

	<i>2004</i>	2007
Has seriously thought about deferring/discontinuing	<i>31.1</i>	<i>29.3</i>
Reason:		
Emotional health	<i>55.8</i>	<i>55.3</i>
I found employment	<i>14.0</i>	<i>16.0</i>
Physical health	<i>30.2</i>	<i>29.2</i>
Problems with daily travel	<i>15.1</i>	<i>23.6</i>
I disliked studying	<i>31.4</i>	<i>33.3</i>
Family commitments	<i>14.0</i>	<i>25.4</i>
University wasn't what I expected	<i>27.9</i>	<i>27.5</i>
I wanted to change courses	<i>51.2</i>	<i>35.2</i>
Financial reasons	<i>43.2</i>	<i>40.0</i>
Paid work commitments	<i>15.1</i>	<i>18.3</i>
I thought I might fail	<i>42.2</i>	<i>38.8</i>

We also asked students who had considered deferring or discontinuing their course what had made them decide *not* to do so. Advice from family and friends was by far the most important reason (63.8 per cent). Students were relatively unlikely to be swayed by advice from university staff and support services, apart from students over 25 years of age, of whom 20.0 per cent said advice from university staff was an important reason for their decision not to defer.

Table 2.10 Reasons for deciding not to defer (percentage important or very important)

	<i>2004</i>	2007
Reason for deciding against deferring		
Advice from family or friends		<i>63.8</i>
Advice from university staff		<i>3.8</i>
Assistance received from or through La Trobe		
University support services		<i>2.2</i>
Other		<i>30.3</i>

3 Student expectations and adjustments to university study

3.1 Adjusting to university assessment and standards

Respondents were asked to estimate their average grade in first semester. The average estimated grade was 70.79%, and almost half of the respondents felt that their grades were about what they had expected (45.2 per cent). However a significant proportion, 35.7 per cent, found that their grades had been lower than they expected.

Table 3.1 Average grade in first semester and expectations of grades

	2004	2007
Over-all average grade	69.04	70.79
Less than 50%	2.8	1.9
50-60%	15.1	12.2
61-70%	34.0	30.1
71-80%	35.1	37.8
81-100%	13.0	18.0
This mark was...		
...higher than expected	13.4	19.2
...the same as expected	52.2	45.2
...lower than expected	34.3	35.7

3.3 Adjusting to the first year

3.3.1 The school to university transition

Respondents who had begun university directly after finishing school were asked about their school-to-university transition experience. Most respondents agreed that they had “really wanted to go to university” (75.8 per cent) while 10.6 per cent disagreed with the statement. Australian full-fee paying students were the most likely to agree at 92.9 per cent followed by those who spoke a language other than English and those from Catholic schools.

Overall, 44.1 per cent felt that the standard of work required at university was higher than they had expected. Low achievers were the most likely to feel this way (50.0 per cent), followed by students with a disability (51.1 per cent) and full-fee paying Australian students (50.0 per cent).

Nearly half (48.6 per cent) had felt pressured at school to go to university. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this sentiment was most likely to be expressed by those from independent schools (74.1 per cent). Students with a disability (56.5 per cent) and those who spoke a language other than English at home (56.1 per cent) were also more likely to have felt such pressure at school.

Almost one quarter felt pressured by the financial commitment their parents had made to send them to university, particularly full fee-paying overseas students (75.0 per cent).

Other indicators of transition success are set out below:

Table 3.2 Transition from secondary school to university (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
At my school there was a lot of pressure to go to university	45.4	48.6
I received good advice from teachers at my school about choosing my course	51.7	56.8
I feel pressured by the financial commitment made by my parents to send me to university	19.6	24.5
The standard of work required at university is much higher than I expected	44.1	42.8
I was not really ready to choose a university course on leaving secondary school	27.5	33.6
My final school year was very good preparation for the study I am now doing	40.9	40.2
My parents have little understanding of what I do at university	33.2	33.0
The subjects/units at university clearly build on my study at school	43.1	41.3
During Year 12 I really wanted to go to university	76.4	75.8

Students in transition were also asked about their year 12 grades (the average was 78.62) and whether they had worked during their final year of high school (60.8 per cent had done so).

3.3.2 Academic orientation

There have been small increases in the extent to which La Trobe first year students expressed their enjoyment of, and engagement with, their academic endeavours since 2004. Around half of the respondents found lectures stimulating and found satisfaction in their studies. Two thirds said that they enjoyed the intellectual challenge of their studies.

Table 3.3 Academic orientation (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I get a lot of satisfaction from studying	48.6	50.6
I enjoy the intellectual challenge of subjects I am studying	63.4	66.3
The lectures often stimulate my interest in the subjects	48.4	50.4

Those over 25 were the most likely to enjoy the intellectual challenge of their studies (86.7 per cent). Perhaps unsurprisingly, low achievers were least likely to agree that they enjoyed the intellectual challenge (43.2 per cent, compared to 75.5 per cent for high achievers).

3.3.3 Academic application

Nearly 40 per cent of students found it difficult to motivate themselves to study, and a similar number regularly sought advice from staff. Conversely, 32.7 per cent *disagreed* with the proposition that they find it difficult to get motivated and 29.5 per cent *disagreed* that they regularly sought the advice of staff. This finding suggests a certain amount of ambivalence from students on this measure.

Table 3.4 Academic application (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I regularly seek advice and help from teaching staff	33.0	36.6
I find it difficult to get myself motivated to study	39.6	39.5

3.5 Other adjustment issues

Some students were not overly enthusiastic about some other adjustment issues: only half had found the orientation program helpful, and a similar amount felt that they were part of a learning community. About one quarter had still not made any close friends by second semester, and one third said that they generally kept to themselves.

However, over sixty per cent of respondents had found administration staff to be helpful, and over eighty per cent found email and on-line services easy to use.

Table 3.5 Other selected adjustment issues (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
The university orientation programs helped get me off to a good start	54.1	51.9
I feel part of a group of students and staff committed to learning	58.9	49.9
I generally keep to myself at university	26.4	30.3
I have made at least one or two close friends at university	81.3	75.9
Over all, being a university student is very different to what I had imagined		30.5
Most administrative staff (front desk staff etc) are helpful and informative	-	61.6
Student email and other on-line services, like changing my address, were easy to use	-	80.2

4 Engaging with learners and learning at university

4.1 How students spend their time

Nearly 75 per cent of students spent four to five days per week on campus. These findings were stable across demographic groups, although fee-payers were likely to spend a little more time on campus, and part-timers a little less.

Table 4.1 Days per week (including evenings and half-days) typically spent on campus

	2004	2007
One	1.9	2.0
Two	1.5	5.8
Three	16.9	25.0
Four	30.8	32.5
Five	43.2	29.5
Six	1.5	1.3
Seven	4.1	3.9
Four or less days per week	51.1	65.3
Five or more days per week	48.9	34.7

Considered in terms of hours, 58.6 per cent of student spent between 11 and 20 hours per week on campus. Full-time students spent an average of 15.52 hours per week on campus, and part-timers 11.07 hours.

Table 4.2 Average course contact hours (per week)

	2004	2007
1 to 5 Hours	3.2	4.2
6 to 10 Hours	9.2	14.3
11 to 15 Hours	38.5	46.6
16 to 20 Hours	20.1	16.5
21 to 25 Hours	22.3	13.3
26 to 30 Hours	5.7	4.5
31 or more Hours	1.1	0.7

Respondents were also asked about the amount of time they spent on various study-related activities. The bulk of student time was committed to direct course contact (around 15 hours per week). Including time spent using the internet for study and time spent on independent study brings time commitments to key academic tasks to an average of just over 30 hours per week.

Table 4.3 A typical 7-day week during first semester. Average number of hours spent on selected tasks

	2004	2007
Course contact (e.g. lectures/practical classes)	16.87	15.03
Using the internet for study/research	3.72	6.20
Independent Study	9.59	9.92
Using the internet for recreation	3.76	6.08
Paid work (all students)*	6.98	9.95
Paid work (those working only)	12.18	14.09

*Note: 'Paid work' denotes the average number of hours worked across the entire sample, including students who are not employed. 'Paid work (those working only)' denotes the average number of hours worked by employed students only.

Other activities students undertake in a typical 'on-campus' day are set out over page.

Table 4.4 A typical day on campus. Average number of hours spent on selected activities

	2004	2007
Commuting to and from university	1.38	1.67
Independent study	2.11	2.95
Using the library	0.79	1.58
Paid work	0.98	2.11
Recreation	1.74	2.25
Sport	0.61	1.07
Household/family duties	1.35	2.30
Social activities	1.52	2.09
Other significant activity (e.g. volunteering)	0.22	0.45

Most respondents (70.4 per cent) had a quiet place where they could study, a drop over 2004 levels, while 11.3 percent *disagreed* that they had such a study space. Somewhat less than half the respondents (40.2 per cent) agreed that they were strategic about the way they managed their workload, suggesting poor use of time.

Table 4.5 Study and workload (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I have a quiet place where I can do my study	75.6	70.4
I am strategic about the way I manage my academic workload	36.7	40.2

4.2 Measures of student engagement in the first year

Overall, around two thirds to three quarters of students reported that they were happy with their subject choices, their experience of being on campus and being a student generally. However, less than half — 44.5 per cent — felt that they were part of ‘the university community.’ Only 11.9 per cent took part in extra-curricula activities, a drop since 2004, which perhaps reflects the introduction of voluntary student unionism legislation.

Only 35.8 per cent of respondents agreed that they had been given helpful advice choosing subjects. Full-fee paying overseas students (51.1 per cent) and those over 25 (49.6 per cent) were more likely to agree that they had received good advice. Males (43.7 per cent) were more likely to agree than females (33.3 per cent).

Table 4.6 Indicators of student engagement (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I am satisfied with the subject/unit choices I made this year	59.1	66.4
I was satisfied with the range of subjects/units from which I could choose this year	45.5	45.8
I was given helpful advice when choosing my subjects/units	35.0	35.8
I really like being a university student	71.6	73.1
I really like being on my university campus	63.6	68.8
I feel I belong to the university community	47.5	44.5
I am actively involved in university extra-curricular activities (e.g. cultural, sporting)	14.8	11.9

4.2.2 Engaging with academic staff and other students

The items set out in the tables below are intended as proxy measures for students' connectedness with academic staff and their student colleagues.

Nearly three-quarters felt that their tutorial classes were about the right size, and a similar number felt they had ample opportunity to participate in tutorials. Only one in five (19.9) reported that they felt very uncomfortable participating in tutorials, although even this number is somewhat troubling. However, it represents a small drop since 2004.

As the increase in student enrolments across the sector has often meant larger classes and the need to break tutorials into smaller group discussions, we asked students how useful they found such discussions. Around half agreed that they were very useful. 23.7 per cent *disagreed* with the proposition that small group discussions were very useful. It is interesting to note that around half of respondents felt there was a positive attitude towards learning among their fellow students (12.8 per cent disagreed). This figure may well be correlated to the finding of how useful students found small group discussions with their colleagues. Just under 20 per cent of respondents worked with other students on projects during class and outside of class, with slightly less saying that they frequently studied with other students.

Table 4.7 Engagement with other students (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
There is a positive attitude towards learning among my fellow students	54.9	51.3
I find breaking into small discussion groups in tutorials very useful	-	49.5
My tutorial/practical classes are about the right size	-	72.2
I feel very uncomfortable participating in group discussions (e.g. tutorials)	22.6	19.9
In tutorials/practical classes, I feel I have plenty of opportunity to contribute to discussion	-	71.3

Table 4.8 Frequency of shared tasks (percent answering 'frequently')

	2004	2007
Work with other students on projects during class	20.1	18.7
Work with classmates outside of class on a group assignment	15.7	18.1
Study with other students	21.5	17.7
Work with other students on course areas with which you had problems	34.7	31.9
Borrow course notes and materials from friends in the same subjects/units	6.6	7.8

Students were also generally supportive of the value of staff consultations and peer study.

Table 4.9 Usefulness of various aspects of students' course or program (percentage useful or very useful)

	2004	2007
One-to-one consultations with teaching staff	69.9	75.4
Studying with other students	65.3	67.0

Nearly three-quarters of students were confident that at least one of their teachers knew their name, an indicator included as a simple proxy of students' sense of personal connectedness to those who teach them at university. This 2007 finding was slightly higher than the

corresponding finding for 2004, which was in turn higher than the national average (66 per cent).

Table 4.10 Connectedness (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I feel confident that at least one of my teachers knows my name	68.7	72.0

4.2.3 Engaging with the learning environment

Fostering an environment in which students are active participants in their own learning, and in which they are able to develop a sense of belonging, are important contributing factors to overall student engagement. While very few students reported skipping classes or coming to class without having completed readings or assignments, only 11.9 per cent said they frequently made class presentations (60.3 per cent said 'sometimes' and 27.8 per cent said 'never'). While 40.5 per cent frequently asked questions in class, 50.7 said that they sometimes did and 8.8 per cent said that they never asked questions in class.

Table 4.11 Frequency of selected activities and actions (percent answering 'frequently')

	2004	2007
Asked questions in class or contribute to class discussion	35.1	40.5
Made class presentations	10.5	11.9
Came to class without completing readings or assignments	11.8	14.6
Skipped classes	10.1	7.8
Bought a book from the university bookstore	49.1	47.5
Studied on the weekends	46.9	49.9
Borrowed a book from the university library	37.3	44.2
Used the web for study purposes	62.8	79.2
Received prompt feedback from teachers on assessed tasks	29.0	21.9
Attended a training session in the university library	-	4.3

As well as the 7.8 per cent of respondents who said that they frequently skipped classes, 56.2 per cent reported that they sometimes skipped classes, a total of 64.0 per cent. We asked these students why they skipped classes. The most commonly cited reason was simply not wanting to go to class, followed by the need to catch up on other study. Around half of the 'skippers' had work commitments, and just over one third did not go to class as they hadn't done the reading. Troublingly, 29.0 per cent missed classes because they felt intimidated.

Table 4.12 Reasons for skipping class for those who sometimes or frequently skipped class (percent 'important' for each reason)

	2004	2007
Work commitments	-	49.3
Studying / catching up on other subjects	-	60.9
Socialising	-	43.5
Feeling intimidated by classes	-	29.0
I just didn't want to go	-	68.1
I hadn't done the reading/preparation	-	34.8

4.2.4 Engaging through on-line technologies

Access to computers and internet

While less students were satisfied with their access to computers at university than was the case in 2004, more had satisfactory access at home. The most common home access to the internet was broadband (79.7 per cent had broadband at home, however some respondents ticked both broadband and dial up).

Table 4.13 Access to computers and the internet (percent with such access)

	2004	2007
Satisfactory access to computers at university	92.2	85.7
Satisfactory access to computers at home	83.7	92.9
Broadband internet at home	-	79.7
Dial up internet at home	-	27.1

Using ICTs to engage with the learning community

There have been large shifts in the way students use technology to network with their peers and teachers since 2004. Around twice as many students are contacting their colleagues and teachers using email than was the case three years before, and six per cent more are taking part in on-line discussion groups. Use of web-based resources has increased from 64.9 per cent to 73.7 per cent, yet 44.9 per cent of students would like more on-line resources.

Table 4.14 Frequency of ICT use (percent answering at least weekly)

	2004	2007
Use email to contact friends in your course	12.5	24.9
Use email to contact lecturers/tutors	14.9	26.0
Use online discussion groups	9.4	15.3
Use web-based resources and information designed specifically for the course	64.9	73.7

Table 4.15 Percentage requesting more on-line learning resources

	2004	2007
I would like more online resources to help me learn in this course	44.0	44.9

As well as finding rates of student use of technologies, we also asked how useful they found these technologies. On-line resources and student email were generally praised, but only 34.0 per cent of those who studied on-line found doing so useful. Further, 69.2 per cent of respondents found the library, including electronic resources, adequate for their needs (9.3 per cent disagreed with this proposition).

Table 4.16 Usefulness of aspects of course or program (percentage useful or very useful)

	2004	2007
Online resources (e.g. course notes and materials on the internet)	77.9	85.0
Computer software (e.g. CD ROMs) designed specifically for the course	51.3	49.4
Using email to contact lecturers/tutors	64.1	76.8
Using email to contact other students	38.3	64.9
Online discussion with other students	47.1	47.7
Subjects/units offered online with no face-to-face classes	26.8	34.0
Learning at my own pace using online resources	53.5	50.0

5 Managing commitments in the first year

5.1 Sources of Income

One third of students had their parents or guardians as their only or main source of financial support, a small decrease since 2004. Just under one quarter (23.0 per cent) relied on Youth Allowance or Austudy. Part-time students were more likely to rely on part-time work than full-time work.

Table 5.1 Financial support for expenses (including course and ancillary fees) while at university. (Percentage only and main sources of support)

	2004	2007	Full-time	Part-time
Youth Allowance/Austudy/Abstudy	30.1	23.0	24.1	15.8
Part-time/casual work	34.4	45.2	46.4	37.9
Full-time work	2.5	3.5	2.2	14.7
Parents/Family	39.8	33.0	34.9	16.8
Savings	10.0	12.0	12.4	6.3
Scholarship/Cadetship	2.9	5.1	3.9	14.7
Loans	1.8	1.2	1.3	1.1
Spouse/Partner	2.9	5.1	3.9	14.7
Any form of unemployment benefit	0.7	1.0	0.9	2.1
Other (please state):	2.2	2.9	1.8	11.6

5.2 Students in paid work

5.2.1 Hours of paid work

Overall students worked in paid employment 9.95 hours per week (see also section 4.1, “How students spend their time,” above). 70.6 per cent of students were undertaking some form of paid work. Of those who worked, the average time spent at work was 14.09 hours per week. Full-time students in employment worked on average 12.99 hours per week, and part-time students 21.63 hours per week. 64.3 per cent of students said work moderately or severely interfered with their studies.

Table 5.2 Average hours of paid work undertaken per week

	2004	2007
Paid work (all students)	6.98	9.95
Paid work (those working only)	12.18	14.09

Note: ‘Paid work’ denotes the average number of hours worked across the entire sample, including students who are not employed. ‘Paid work (those working only)’ denotes the average number of hours worked by employed students only.

Considering the spread of hours worked, most employed full-time students worked between six and fifteen hours per week. A small but notable 3.8 percent of full-time students worked in excess of twenty-five hours per week. One quarter of part-time students worked more than thirty-one hours per week. 62.9 per cent of employed full-time students and 72.7 per cent of employed part-time students felt their work severely or moderately interfered with their study.

Table 5.3 Spread of hours of paid work per week (percentage)

	2007	Full-time	Part-time
1 to 5 Hours	12.0	12.9	6.7
6 to 10 Hours	28.1	30.3	14.7
11 to 15 Hours	28.6	29.8	20.0
16 to 20 Hours	18.6	18.3	16.0
21 to 25 Hours	5.4	4.8	9.3
26 to 30 Hours	2.3	1.6	8.0
31 or more Hours	5.0	2.2	25.3

Table 5.4 Interference of paid work with academic performance (percentage)

	<i>2004</i>	2007
Severely	<i>9.1</i>	11.0
Moderately	<i>46.3</i>	53.3
Not at all	<i>44.6</i>	35.7

5.2.2 Reasons for undertaking paid work

Students had a variety of reasons for undertaking paid work, but the most common were meeting the basic necessities of life or supplementing these with entertainment and other ‘extras.’

Table 5.5 Main reasons for doing paid work (percentage)

	<i>2004</i>	2007
To meet basic needs (such as rent, food, transport)	<i>66.1</i>	62.9
To afford ‘extras’ (such as travel and entertainment)	<i>77.6</i>	68.9
To support my family	<i>7.9</i>	8.9
To pay off current loans or debts	<i>26.7</i>	19.1
To save for paying off future HECS debts	<i>28.5</i>	21.3
To be more financially independent of my family	<i>67.9</i>	54.7
To improve my employability after I finish university	<i>37.6</i>	28.3
To gain work experience relevant to my course	<i>10.3</i>	18.0

5.3 *Comprehending and coping*

Part of adjusting to university life is learning to cope with study and other commitments in a largely independent and undirected environment, and 23.7 per cent of respondents were finding it difficult to adjust to the style of teaching at university. School background had little impact here: the corresponding findings by school type were Catholic school 24.4 per cent; government school 22.7 per cent; independent school 27.7 per cent and overseas school 17.1 per cent.

Many students were struggling somewhat with their study commitments in their first year, with around 40 per cent finding their course workload ‘too heavy,’ feeling ‘overwhelmed’ or finding it ‘really hard’ to keep up with the volume of work required. Over one third worried about money so much that it made it difficult for them to study. 22.5 per cent of respondents felt that it was possible to skip a lot of classes in their course. Low achievers (52.8 per cent) were the most likely to be finding it hard to keep up with the volume of work.

Table 5.6 Comprehending and coping (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	2004	2007
I find it quite difficult to comprehend a lot of the material		
I am supposed to study	24.4	24.0
Feel overwhelmed by all you had to do	35.5	36.8
You can skip a lot of classes in this course	22.5	19.7
I have had difficulty adjusting to the style of teaching at university	31.3	23.7
Worrying about money has made it difficult for me to concentrate on study	36.1	36.6
My course workload is too heavy	32.7	39.1
I find it really hard to keep up with the volume of work in this course	27.8	40.1

5.4 Accessing support services

We asked participants to tell us which of La Trobe's student services they have used and, if they have used a service, how useful they found it. Some of the sample sizes here are rather small so we have included n-counts in the table below.

Table 5.7 Percentage of students who have used various services, and percentage of those users who found the service "very useful"

	Have used the service	Found the service very useful
Indigenous Student Services	3.7 (n= 34)	52.9
Language and Academic Skills Units	27.2 (n=248)	60.1
Residential Services	14.3 (n=130)	70.8
Careers and Employment	20.8 (n=190)	43.2
Chaplaincy	6.4 (n=58)	60.3
Childcare	3.1 (n=28)	32.1
Counselling	10.5 (n=96)	57.3
Deaf students' services	2.1 (n=19)	26.3
Disability services	4.5 (n=41)	61.0
Equity and Access	8.1 (n=74)	59.5
Financial Aid	8.6 (n=78)	64.1
Health Services	14.6 (n=133)	72.2
International Student Support Services	8.0 (n=73)	38.4
IT and computing services	46.5 (n=424)	66.0
Ombudsman	3.4 (n=31)	29.0
Student association (Guild or SRC)	32.2 (n=294)	41.8
Student Legal Service	4.2 (n=38)	36.8

6 Perceptions of teaching and satisfaction with courses

6.1 Perceptions of teaching in the first year

Respondents had a generally favourable view of teaching staff. Staff were seen by most as enthusiastic, approachable, and delivering a high quality of teaching. Students were less positive about the level of feedback they received on their progress, with 32.4 per cent disagreeing with the proposition that feedback was helpful. More students disagreed with the proposition that staff took an interest in their progress than agreed.

In the table below, it is interesting to note that general aspects of good teaching, such as staff enthusiasm for the subject, overall teaching quality, approachability, the ability of staff to make things interesting, and their encouragement of their students, score highly. However, more aspects of teaching which impact on the student as an individual, such as staff being available to discuss a student's work, making an effort to understand student difficulties, providing feedback and taking an interest in a student's work, score at the low end of the scale.

Table 5.8 Perceptions of teaching (percentage agree 2004 and 2007; percentage disagree 2007)

	2004 <i>agree</i>	2007 <i>agree</i>	2007 <i>disagree</i>
Teaching staff are enthusiastic about the subjects/units they teach	73.2	73.2	6.2
The quality of teaching in my course is generally good	80.6	77.9	6.4
Most of the teaching staff are approachable	77.9	78.7	7.5
The teaching staff are good at explaining things	66.0	65.0	9.0
Teaching staff try hard to make the subjects/units interesting	59.5	58.8	12.3
Teaching staff are usually available to discuss my work	50.9	51.7	15.1
Staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their studies	52.7	48.6	19.6
Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress	29.7	33.4	32.4
Most academic teaching staff take an interest in my progress	30.9	25.3	38.9
I have been encouraged to think critically	-	73.5	5.3
I have been encouraged to be an independent learner	77.5	79.3	5.4
Teaching staff made it clear from the start what they expect from students	67.8	64.5	11.3
Teaching staff make good use of the internet to support my learning	55.6	52.2	16.9

The question of staff being perceived as giving helpful feedback on students' progress was particularly stratified by the type of school students had attended. Of those schooled in Australia, students from government schools had the most favourable perceptions of staff feedback and those from independent schools the least.

Table 5.9 "Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress" (percentage)

	Catholic school	Government school	Independent school	Overseas school
Disagree	37.4	27.4	43.2	20.0
Agree	29.6	38.4	22.6	40.0

6.2 Perceptions of course overall

Students generally found their course and university experiences to be positive. The least likely to agree that they were satisfied with their university experience so far were low achievers (48.0 per cent), while the most satisfied were international full-fee paying students (82.5 per cent).

Table 5.10 Overall perception of course (percentage agree or strongly agree)

	<i>2004</i>	2007
Generally my course is well organised	<i>68.8</i>	68.2
I am finding my course intellectually stimulating	<i>75.4</i>	79.2
Overall, I am really enjoying my course	<i>68.3</i>	71.5
Overall, I am very satisfied with my university experience so far	<i>68.6</i>	68.6

Summary and conclusion

Below, we overview the main findings of the study. We also make some suggestions for further research.

6.1 Aspirations, change and uncertainty in the first year

- Student were most likely to have decided to come to university in order to study in a field that interests them (96.0 per cent), yet they are also very motivated by career matters, with 90.3 per cent enrolling to improve their job prospects.
- Just over one quarter of students had indicated that the expectations of their parents or family had been an important reason for enrolling. This was an important reason for 58.6 per cent of international students.
- Nearly two thirds of students had given La Trobe their first preference. High achievers were more likely to have given La Trobe their first preference (69.2 per cent) than low achievers (49.1 per cent).
- Nearly 30 per cent of respondents had seriously thought about deferring. The most common reason given was emotional health (55.3 per cent). The most common reason for deciding not to defer was advice from friends and family (63.8 per cent).

6.2 Student expectations and adjustments to university study

- The average expected grade given by respondents was 70.79 per cent, and 35.7 per cent said their first semester grades had been lower than they expected. 19.2 per cent said that their grades were higher than they expected.
- Nearly half of the respondents who had come to university straight from high school said that there was a lot of pressure on them at their school to go to university. Those from independent school, who had a disability, or who spoke a language other than English at home were the most likely to feel this way.

6.3 Engaging with learners and learning at university

- Most students spent 4 to 5 days per week on campus, and around 30 hours per week on academic and study related tasks.
- Just under half of the respondents (44.5 per cent) did not agree that they felt part of a university community, and only 11.9 per cent took part in extra-curricula activities at university.
- Most students felt their classes were about the right size and indicated that they had ample opportunity to take part in tutorials. However, 19.9 per cent said that they were very uncomfortable taking part in tutorials.
- 72.0 per cent of respondents felt confident that at least one of their teachers knew their name.
- Overall, most students were successfully engaging with the learning environment.

6.4 Managing commitments in the first year

- 34.9 per cent of full-time students relied on their parents or family as their main source of income, and just under one quarter relied on Youth Allowance/Austudy.
- Overall students worked in paid employment 9.95 hours per week. 70.6 per cent of students were undertaking some form of paid work. Of those who worked, the average time spent at work was 14.09 hours per week.
- 53.3 per cent of those who were in paid employment said that work moderately interfered with their study, and 11.0 per cent said that it interfered severely.
- While most students had adjusted satisfactorily to university life, 23.7 per cent were finding it difficult to adjust to the style of teaching. Around 40 per cent were finding their course workload ‘too heavy,’ feeling ‘overwhelmed’ or finding it ‘really hard’ to keep up with the volume of work required.
- Over one third worried about money so much that it made it difficult for them to study.

6.5 Perceptions of teaching and satisfaction with courses

- Students had a positive perception of teaching the quality of teaching in general, including staff enthusiasm for the subject, overall teaching quality, approachability, the ability of staff to make things interesting, and their encouragement of their students.
- Students were less positive about more personal elements of the learning experience, such as staff being available to discuss a student’s work, making an effort to understand student difficulties, providing feedback and taking an interest in a student’s work.

6.7 Other themes

Low achievers were an interesting cohort which could well warrant further study. For example, low achievers were more likely to be at university because of parental expectations, more likely to be ‘just marking time’ before they decide what to do in life, less likely to have given La Trobe their first preference, more likely to be thinking of deferring but less likely to have deferred in the past, more likely to have changed course or institution or to wish to change in the future, more likely to be dissatisfied with their course and less likely to be intellectually engaged.

Further study of campus differences may also be useful. Because so few students from campuses other than Bundoora and Bendigo responded we have not reported many of the differences here. Further analysis of the data and a program of interviews may be a useful and worthwhile undertaking in the future.

Finally, data about the reasons for deferral, and for thoughts of deferral, has been very difficult to interpret due to numerous inter-relationships and complexities. Also, it is difficult to understand deferral without access to information about those who have deferred and not returned. This area would be a ripe one for further study, and again, an interview program may be useful.

Appendix 1 Survey instrument



Dear Student

We are conducting a study of the experiences of first year undergraduate students at La Trobe University. Your response to this questionnaire will enable us to develop a picture of what first year students think of various aspects of university life. Your participation is entirely *voluntary* and *anonymous*.

Your contribution will be important in locating areas of concern to first year university students, and assisting the university in improving the experiences of students in their first year of university study.

This survey has been sent to all first year students at La Trobe University. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes of your time. Please note that the confidentiality of your response is absolutely assured. No one outside the research team will have access to the survey material. Results will be reported in general and statistical form only.

This survey is being carried out by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. If you have any enquiries about the questionnaire or the project, please do not hesitate to contact the FYE Project Coordinator, Ms Emmaline Bexley, by emailing to: bexleye@unimelb.edu.au. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact Sally Went, La Trobe University Projects and Policy Officer (Learning and Teaching): email S.Went@latrobe.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important study of the first year experience.

Please seal and return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided – no stamp is required.

A: Your Expectations, Goals and Study Habits

In this section, please think about your course or program as a whole rather than individual subjects/units.

1. In deciding to go to university, how important was each of the following for you?

	←→				
	VERY IMPORTANT				NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
Studying in a field that really interests me	1	2	3	4	5
Developing my talents and creative abilities	1	2	3	4	5
Getting training for a specific job	1	2	3	4	5
Improving my job prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Expectations of my parents or family	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	STRONGLY AGREE	↔			STRONGLY DISAGREE
I am clear about the reasons I came to university	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly seek advice and help from teaching staff	1	2	3	4	5
Studying at university is just marking time while I decide my future	1	2	3	4	5
I find it difficult to get myself motivated to study	1	2	3	4	5
I know the type of occupation I want	1	2	3	4	5
I find it quite difficult to comprehend a lot of the material I am supposed to study	1	2	3	4	5
I feel very uncomfortable participating in group discussions (e.g. tutorials)	1	2	3	4	5
I have a quiet place where I can do my study	1	2	3	4	5
I get a lot of satisfaction from studying	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy the intellectual challenge of the subjects/units I am studying	1	2	3	4	5
The lectures often stimulate my interest in the subjects/units	1	2	3	4	5
I am strategic about the way I manage my academic workload	1	2	3	4	5

3. a) During your first semester of study, about how often did you do the following?

	FREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Borrow course notes and materials from friends in the same subjects/units	1	2	3
Buy a book from the university bookshop	1	2	3
Study on weekends	1	2	3
Study with other students out of class	1	2	3
Borrow a book from the university library	1	2	3
Feel overwhelmed by all I had to do	1	2	3
Use the internet for study purposes	1	2	3
Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussion	1	2	3
Make class presentations	1	2	3
Come to class without completing readings or assignments	1	2	3
Work with other students on projects during class	1	2	3
Work with classmates outside of class on a group assignment	1	2	3
Receive prompt feedback from teachers on assessed tasks	1	2	3
Skip classes	1	2	3
Attend a training session in the University Library	1	2	3

b) If you frequently skipped classes, how important were the following reasons:

	VERY IMPORTANT	↔			NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
Work commitments	1	2	3	4	5
Studying / catching up on other subjects/units	1	2	3	4	5
Socialising	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling intimidated by classes	1	2	3	4	5
I just didn't want to go	1	2	3	4	5
I hadn't done the reading/preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please state):	1	2	3	4	5

4. In your experience during your first semester of study, how regularly did you do the following?

	DAILY	WEEKLY	IRREGULARLY	NEVER
Work with other students on course areas with which I had problems	1	2	3	4
Use email to contact friends in my course	1	2	3	4
Use email to contact lecturers/tutors	1	2	3	4
Use online discussion groups	1	2	3	4
Use internet-based resources and information designed specifically for the course	1	2	3	4

B: Your University Experience in 2007

1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (if you have not used a listed service, please circle *na*):

	STRONGLY AGREE		← →		STRONGLY DISAGREE		
The university orientation programs helped get me off to a good start	1	2	3	4	5		<i>na</i>
I feel part of a group of students and staff committed to learning	1	2	3	4	5		
I was given helpful advice when choosing my subjects/units	1	2	3	4	5		<i>na</i>
I was satisfied with the range of subjects/units from which I could choose this year	1	2	3	4	5		<i>na</i>
I really like being a university student	1	2	3	4	5		
Most of the teaching staff are approachable	1	2	3	4	5		
I really like being on my university campus	1	2	3	4	5		
I generally keep to myself at university	1	2	3	4	5		
Teaching staff are usually available to discuss my work	1	2	3	4	5		
I have had difficulty adjusting to the style of teaching at university	1	2	3	4	5		
Worrying about money has made it difficult for me to concentrate on study	1	2	3	4	5		
I have made at least one or two close friends at university	1	2	3	4	5		
I am actively involved in university extra-curricular activities (e.g. cultural, sporting)	1	2	3	4	5		
Over all, being a university student is very different to what I had imagined	1	2	3	4	5		
Most academic teaching staff take an interest in my progress	1	2	3	4	5		
I am satisfied with the subject/unit choices I made this year	1	2	3	4	5		<i>na</i>
I feel I belong to the university community	1	2	3	4	5		
Most administrative staff (front desk staff etc) are helpful and informative	1	2	3	4	5		
Student email and other on-line services, like changing my address, were easy to use	1	2	3	4	5		<i>na</i>

2. Do you have (please circle) ...

a) satisfactory access to computers at university for study purposes?	Yes	No
b) satisfactory access to computer equipment where you live?	Yes	No
c) broadband internet access where you live?	Yes	No
d) dial-up internet access where you live?	Yes	No

3. a) Did you think seriously about discontinuing/deferring at any stage in your first semester of study? Yes No

b) If yes, please indicate the importance of each of the following reasons:

	VERY IMPORTANT		← →		NOT IMPORTANT	
Emotional health	1	2	3	4	5	
I found employment	1	2	3	4	5	
Physical health	1	2	3	4	5	
Problems with daily travel	1	2	3	4	5	
I disliked studying	1	2	3	4	5	
Family commitments	1	2	3	4	5	
University wasn't what I expected	1	2	3	4	5	
I wanted to change courses	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial reasons	1	2	3	4	5	
Paid work commitments	1	2	3	4	5	
I thought I might fail	1	2	3	4	5	
Other (please state):	1	2	3	4	5	

4. How useful have you found the following services during your studies?

	Very useful	↔			Not at all useful	Have not used
Indigenous Student Services	1	2	3	4	5	o
Language and Academic Skills Units	1	2	3	4	5	o
Residential Services	1	2	3	4	5	o
Careers and Employment	1	2	3	4	5	o
Chaplaincy	1	2	3	4	5	o
Childcare	1	2	3	4	5	o
Counselling	1	2	3	4	5	o
Deaf students' services	1	2	3	4	5	o
Disability services	1	2	3	4	5	o
Equity and Access	1	2	3	4	5	o
Financial Aid	1	2	3	4	5	o
Health Services	1	2	3	4	5	o
International Student Support Services	1	2	3	4	5	o
IT and computing services	1	2	3	4	5	o
Ombudsman	1	2	3	4	5	o
Student association (Guild or SRC)	1	2	3	4	5	o
Student Legal Service	1	2	3	4	5	o
Other (please state):	1	2	3	4	5	o

C: Managing Your Commitments in 2007

1. Consider a typical 7-day week during your first semester of study. About how many hours did you spend on:

Course contact (e.g. lectures/practical classes)	_____	hours/wk
Using the internet for study/research	_____	hours/wk
Independent Study	_____	hours/wk
Using the internet for recreation	_____	hours/wk
Paid work	_____	hours/wk

If you do not do paid work, please go to question 3, below.

If you do paid work:

2. a) To what extent does paid work interfere with your academic performance (please tick)?

Severely	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

b) What are your main reasons for doing paid work?

You may select more than one reason.

To meet basic needs (such as rent, food, transport)	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
To afford 'extras' (such as travel and entertainment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
To support my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
To pay off current loans or debts	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
To save for paying off future HECS debts	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
To be more financially independent of my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
To improve my employability after I finish university	<input type="checkbox"/>	7
To gain work experience relevant to my course	<input type="checkbox"/>	8

3. Consider your most recent day on campus. In that 24 hours please indicate the approximate number of hours spent on...

	<1	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	10+
Commuting to and from university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using the library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paid work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Household/family duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other significant activity (e.g. volunteer work):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D: Your Views of Courses and Teaching

In this section we would again like you to consider your course or program as a whole rather than individual subjects or units.

1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your course and the teaching within it:

	STRONGLY AGREE		↔		STRONGLY DISAGREE	
I have been encouraged to be an independent learner	1	2	3	4	5	
I am finding my course intellectually stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	
Generally my course is well organised	1	2	3	4	5	
The university library collection including electronic resources is adequate for my needs	1	2	3	4	5	
The teaching staff are good at explaining things	1	2	3	4	5	
My course workload is too heavy	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching staff made it clear from the start what they expect from students	1	2	3	4	5	
I find it really hard to keep up with the volume of work in this course	1	2	3	4	5	
You can skip a lot of classes in this course	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching staff try hard to make the subjects/units interesting	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching staff make good use of the internet to support my learning	1	2	3	4	5	
There is a positive attitude towards learning among my fellow students	1	2	3	4	5	
I feel confident that at least one of my teachers knows my name	1	2	3	4	5	
Staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their studies	1	2	3	4	5	
I would like more online resources to help me learn in this course	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching staff are enthusiastic about the subjects/units they teach	1	2	3	4	5	
The quality of teaching in my course is generally good	1	2	3	4	5	
I find breaking into small discussion groups in tutorials very useful	1	2	3	4	5	
My tutorial/practical classes are about the right size	1	2	3	4	5	
In tutorials/practical classes, I feel I have plenty of opportunity to contribute to discussion	1	2	3	4	5	
I have been encouraged to think critically	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall, I am really enjoying my course	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall, I am very satisfied with my university experience so far	1	2	3	4	5	

2. How useful have you found the following aspects of your course or program?

	Very useful		↔		Not at all useful		Have not used
One-to-one consultations with teaching staff	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Online resources (e.g. course notes and materials on the internet)	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Computer software (e.g. CD ROMs) designed specifically for the course	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Using email to contact lecturers/tutors	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Using email to contact other students	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Online discussion with other students	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Studying with other students	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Subjects/units offered online with no face-to-face classes	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Learning at my own pace using online resources	1	2	3	4	5	o	
Course notes and compiled course readings	1	2	3	4	5	o	

E: Transition from School to University

This section to be answered only by school leavers who completed secondary schooling in 2005 or 2006. If you left school before those years, please move to the final section, Section F.

1. Please give details of your final secondary school year(s):

Type/Name of Certificate: _____

Score received: _____

State/Country where completed: _____

2. Did you undertake paid work in your final year of school?

Please circle: _____ Yes No

3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning your transition from secondary school to university:

	STRONGLY AGREE	← →	STRONGLY DISAGREE
At my school there was a lot of pressure to go to university	1	2	3 4 5
I received good advice from teachers at my school about choosing my course	1	2	3 4 5
I feel pressured by the financial commitment made by my parents to send me to university	1	2	3 4 5
The standard of work required at university is much higher than I expected	1	2	3 4 5
I was not really ready to choose a university course on leaving secondary school	1	2	3 4 5
My final school year was very good preparation for the study I am now doing	1	2	3 4 5
My parents have little understanding of what I do at university	1	2	3 4 5
The subjects/units at university clearly build on my study at school	1	2	3 4 5
During Year 12 I really wanted to go to university	1	2	3 4 5

F: About You and Your Study

1. Your year of birth: _____ 19__

2. Your sex: _____ Female Male

3. Are you an Australian Aborigine or a Torres Strait Islander? _____ Yes No

4. If you are an Australian resident, what is the postcode of your permanent home address? _____

5. a) In what country were you and your parents born?

Your country of birth: _____

Mother's country of birth: _____

Father's country of birth: _____

b) If you were born overseas, for how many years have you lived in Australia (please tick)?

Less than 2 years 1

2-5 years 2

6-10 years 3

more than 10 years 4

c) If you grew up in Australia, did you grow up in a rural / regional area or town? _____ Yes No

6. Is a language other than English spoken in your family home most of the time? _____ Yes No

7. Do you have a disability, impairment or long term medical condition which may affect your studies? _____ Yes No

8. a) What is the highest level of education completed by your parents?

	Mother	Father
Primary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Postgraduate degree	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

b) Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend university? _____ Yes No

9. a) Mother's occupation while you were in secondary school (please be specific e.g. accounts manager in a retail company): _____

b) Father's occupation while you were in secondary school (please be specific): _____

10. Do you have dependants (e.g. children or elderly relatives)? Yes No

11. In your last year of secondary schooling, what type of school did you attend?

Catholic 1

Government 2

Independent/Private 3

School overseas 4

12. In what type of course or program are you enrolled?

Bachelors Degree 1

Combined Bachelors Degree Course e.g. BA/LLB 2

Combined Bachelors Degree & Diploma e.g. BADipEd 3

Undergraduate diploma 4

Other 5

13. What campus are you primarily enrolled at?

Melbourne (Bundoora) 1

Melbourne (City) 2

Bendigo 3

Albury-Wodonga 4

Mildura 5

Shepparton 6

Beechworth 7

14. In which Faculty/School are you primarily enrolled?

Education 1

Health Sciences 2

Humanities and Social Sciences 3

Science, Technology and Engineering 4

Law and Management

School of Business 5

School of Law 6

School of Sport, Tourism & Hospitality Management 7

15. Your enrolment type (please circle): Full-time Part-time

16. How are you paying your university fees?

I am a HECS-HELP student and have paid upfront 1

I am a HECS-HELP student and deferred my payments 2

I am an international full-fee paying student 3

I am an Australian full-fee paying student and paid upfront 4

I am an Australian full-fee paying student and deferred my payment (Fee-HELP) 5

Other? (please specify) _____

17. Have you commenced or completed a university or Vocational Education and Training (VET) course before this academic year?

Completed a university degree/diploma course 1

Completed a university enabling course 2

Completed a VET course 3

Commenced but not completed a university degree/diploma 4

Commenced but not completed a VET course 5

Other? _____ 6

18. a) Did you defer your university enrolment last year? Yes No

b) If yes, briefly, what was your reason for deferring?

Financial 1

Health 2

Family responsibilities 3

Work 4

Travel 5

Study elsewhere 6

Other _____ 7

19. a) Did you think about deferring your university enrolment last year, but decide against it? Yes No

b) If yes, briefly, what made you decide against deferring?

Advice from family or friends 1

Advice from University staff 2

Assistance received from or through La Trobe University support services 3

Other _____ 4

20. On your university application, what preference did you give to the course in which you are now enrolled?

1st 1

2nd 2

3rd 3

4th 4

other _____ 5

21. After your first enrolment this year, did you change course or institution?

Course? Yes No

Institution? Yes No

22. Do you hope to change to a different course or institution next year?

Course? Yes No

Institution? Yes No

23. Have you withdrawn from any subjects/units this year?

Yes: How many? _____

No:

24. Please tick if you are enrolled in any:

distance subjects/units	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
open learning subjects/units (OLA)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
subjects/units in another institution	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

25. a) Which category best represents your average overall mark for your first semester of study this year?

Less than 50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
50 to 60%	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
61 to 70%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
71 to 80%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
81 to 100%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

b) Is this mark higher, lower or the same as you expected at the start of the year?

Higher	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Lower	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

26. During semester, how many days per week (including evenings and half-days) do you typically spend on campus?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. Your sources of financial support for expenses (including course and ancillary fees) while at university. Please indicate to what extent each of the following sources contributes to your income.

	Not an income source	Only income source	Main income source	Minor income source
Youth Allowance/Austudy/Abstudy	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Part-time/casual work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Full-time work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Parents/Family	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Savings	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Scholarship/Cadetship	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Loans	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Spouse/Partner	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Any form of unemployment benefit	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Other (please state):	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

27. How often have you changed accommodation since you took up your place at university (including from your family home)?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Once	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Twice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Three or more times	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

28. Your main type of accommodation in first semester:

Family/Guardians	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
University accommodation –	
Colleges or Apartments/Hall of Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Private board	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Renting with friends or co-tenants	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Own house/unit/flat	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Presently homeless	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Other	7

29. On taking up your place at university please indicate if you moved:

Within the same state	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Interstate	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Overseas	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Did not move	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

G: Your comments: Please answer the following if you would like to tell us more

What did you like best about your first year at university?:

What aspect of your first year at university did you find the most challenging or difficult?:

If you could do one thing to give future students a better experience of their first year at La Trobe, what would it be?:

Thank you for your time participating in our study, and best wishes for the remainder of your university experience