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Exploring the expectations and experiences of first year students undergoing a tailored transition initiative

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Exploring the expectations and experiences of first year students undergoing a tailored transition initiative

Abstract

Successful transition for students commencing university is a focus of increasing institutional interest and resourcing to optimise student success and retention. Investigation of student expectations of university commencement and their lived experience provides an opportunity for identification of a potential mismatch which has received less scrutiny. The Bachelor of Sport Development has an integrated transition initiative with an employability and academic skill development focussed curriculum, designed to support students' successful transition into university. The transition initiative was informed by the Five Senses of Success and First Year Curriculum Principles. This article reports student expectations in week one and at the completion of the first semester after experiencing the transition initiative. Students reported changes in their expectations, assessment concerns, and the assistance they expected from lecturers over this period. Students' early exposure to employability-focused curriculum provided valuable insights into their future profession, consequently reinforcing their long-term goal of employment in the sport sector. Results highlight the effectiveness of the supportive, student focused strategies embedded within the tailored transition initiative in the first semester of study.

Practitioner Notes

1. The transition to tertiary study can be stressful, and many students at Australian universities do not feel prepared.
2. The alignment of student expectations with the reality experienced by students is closely correlated to overall student experience and satisfaction.
3. Deliberate inclusion of academic skill development and employability curricula and assessment are critical design elements to support students' successful transition into university.
4. Student expectations and experiences during their first semester of university, connected with their initial desire for future employment in their discipline of interest, can reinforce both their program selection and their career aspirations.

Keywords

Transition, expectations, professional identity, motivation

Introduction

Requirements for university admittance have diversified since the start of the 21st century, to better accommodate the needs of commencing students from a variety of socio-economic, academic, and cultural backgrounds. All students experience a sequence of personal transition stages, which reflect specific identities, including pre-enrolment, tertiary student, and professional identity development (Taylor et al., 2007). Successful transition to university is defined as a student settling confidently into university life, making new friends, while at the same time developing a sense of connectedness and belonging with peers and staff (Farhat et al., 2017). This period of transition can be experienced as a stressful major life change for individuals, presenting both challenges and opportunities (Kift et al., 2010; Mateu et al., 2020; Millman & McNamara, 2018). In the weeks prior to commencement of their tertiary journey, many students experience feelings of excitement and anticipation, envisioning wider personal freedoms, new and novel activities, and the opportunity to make new friends (Kift, 2009). During this transition period, elevation of psychological distress, including anxiety, may be experienced, extending through the first few weeks of university (Cheung et al., 2020). This commencing period is considered a 'window of maximal risk' for specific groups, particularly students from low socio-economic backgrounds and first-in-family students due to their lower levels of academic and coping skills (Devlin & McKay, 2014; Willcoxson et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, many students who enter Australian tertiary education are not successful with their tertiary transition, and do not complete their undergraduate degree. According to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2021), approximately 20% of students who commenced university between 2018-2020 did not continue beyond first year. Indeed, approximately one-third of students fail to graduate their program within six years of commencement (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021).

The stressors experienced by students during their university commencement have been explored to understand and respond to student feedback on the first-year university experience (Baik et al., 2015; Bowles et al., 2014; Comi, 2019). To optimise the first year transition, students develop a new range of high-level academic skills supporting their confidence as independent learners (Richardson et al., 2012). In addition to academic stressors and change, social stressors associated with commencing university include making new friends; modifying existing friendships and relationships with friends and family including living out of home. This period may coincide with undertaking adult responsibilities for the first time, such as budgeting money, time, and paid employment responsibilities, in addition to study and social activity. Failure to master these responsibilities is a common reason students withdraw from tertiary study (Bowles et al., 2014).

Individual expectations may also affect whether students transition successfully in the first few weeks of university, how those expectations are solidified, and how new expectations are shaped (Alexson & Kemnitz, 2004). Many universities have introduced transition initiatives to create supportive environments that engage students socially and academically (Allin, et al., 2017; Calcagno, et al., 2017; Turner et.al., 2017). These transition initiatives are often designed to improve student capability, connectedness, purpose, resourcefulness, and culture, collectively designated *The Five Senses of Success* (Lizzio, 2006). Essentially, *The Five Senses of Success* model focuses on the student experience and highlights key social and academic variables that predict first year satisfaction, engagement, and retention (Lizzio, 2006). According to this model, success as a university student requires understanding of knowledge and skills (*capability*); the relationships a student develops with their peers, staff, and the institution (*connectedness*); a powerful sense of

purpose; the ability to access support and balance work and family commitments (*resourcefulness*); and an appreciation of the core values and ethical principles of higher education (*culture*) (Lizzio, 2006).

The Five Senses of Success model, consistent with student development literature, is reported to be predictive of student satisfaction and successful outcomes (Wilson & Lizzio, 2011). Complementary to this model, Kift's (2009) *First Year Curriculum Principles* highlights the importance of intentional first year curriculum designed to actively engage and support new learners through six interconnected principles, one of which is engagement of intentional curriculum design. Further principles include transition, diversity, design, assessment, evaluation, and monitoring. This paper explores the impact of a purposely designed transition initiative informed by *The Five Senses of Success model* (Lizzio, 2006) and the *First Year Curriculum Principles* (Kift, 2009) to optimise the early student experience.

Background

Tailored curriculum supporting academic skill development was designed and implemented as part of the intentional transition initiative to support students to develop of a sense of capability and resourcefulness. Deliberate inclusion and scaffolding of employability curricula and assessments within this transition period and throughout the program were critical design elements used in the development, planning and implementation of the Bachelor of Sport Development (BSD) program. The program design aimed to enhance students' engagement, personal skills, and perceptions around employability during their foundation year of study and throughout their degree. This career and future-focussed design scaffolded support for ongoing student engagement in their future career planning, enhancing each students' sense of purpose and sense of connection to their future profession (Kift, 2009; Wilson & Lizzio, 2011). Key elements of the academic skill development and employability focussed program design including their sequence throughout the program are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
Curricular and co-curricular employability experiences throughout the Bachelor of Sport development lifecycle.

A critical design challenge for the BSD program was the multiplicity of career and employment outcomes for graduates, in the absence of professional accreditation guidelines to help inform and guide the student's professional identity development. As illustrated in Figure 1, the concurrent development of career expectations to optimise student transition facilitated retention and eventual graduate career success for students within this program.

The aims of this study were to: (i) identify the academic and career expectations of BSD students as they enter university; and (ii) determine whether student expectations changed over the course of their first semester, from week one to the completion of the first semester, after being exposed to the tailored transition initiative. The student voice, charting individual expectations over the

semester, could then better inform the impact of the transition initiative to support future student transition and success with their academic and professional development.

Method

Survey design

Purpose-designed student surveys exploring student expectations were administered to the Sport Development degree cohort at the commencement and end of the standard 13-week semester. Qualitative survey questions had two primary foci: 1) demographic information, and 2) student experience and expectations of university. The survey design was adapted from questions previously published regarding first year expectations (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Clark, 2005) and incorporated the published principles of Lizzio (2006) and Kift (2009) to understand the student experience and expectations during the transition into university.

Human Research Ethics approval and consent to participate was submitted, reviewed, and approved by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2018) and the study was granted approval prior to project commencement (Griffith University internal reference: AHS/69/14/REC).

The first survey was available during week one, prior to transition strategies commencing. It covered the orientation experience (*sense of connectedness and culture*) and student goals (*sense of purpose*), motivation, expectations, and challenges (*sense of resourcefulness and capability*) prior to teaching commencement. The second survey was available at the end of the semester, after students had experienced numerous transition learning experiences and strategies, but before their final assessment. These academic lifestyle experiences included: ice breaker activities (*Connectedness and Culture*); mentoring by senior students (*Capability and Resourcefulness*); industry guest speakers (*Purpose and Resourcefulness*); academic skill development workshops tailored to specific student requests (*Capability and Resourcefulness*); and, tailored curriculum and assessment to develop students' understanding of their profession, future employment opportunities, ways of building their employability and the development of an individual career plan (*Purpose, Connectedness, Culture* and *Resourcefulness*).

Project recruitment information advised students that the surveys sought to explore their personal expectations, knowledge, and readiness for university as a commencing student entering the BSD and their experience over the semester. Survey completion was not compulsory, and students were not disadvantaged if they chose not to complete the survey. All responses were de-identified before analysis.

Data collection and analysis

Surveys were administered during class to all commencing students in the BSD Program over two consecutive years (n=102). Overall survey response rates were high, averaging 93% (pre-semester) and 75% (end of semester) over the two years of the study and all survey responses from both years were collated for analysis. Demographic data frequencies for the BSD students were compared with the general university population. Chi-square tests determined any significant differences at the 5% level.

Analysis of qualitative data from open-ended student responses to survey questions utilised an inductive thematic analysis methodology, where data were encoded as a data driven process, not framed by use of a "pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytical pre-conceptions" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This methodology supports identification, analysis and interpretation of themes (Clarke and Braun, 2017). In this study, the open question survey responses were analysed using a six-phase analytical process based on the thematic analysis process as detailed by Braun and Clarke, 2006. In brief, this process sequentially required: 1) familiarisation with survey data; 2) generation of initial coding schema; 3) identification of themes; 4) review of themes; 5) definition and naming themes; and 6) utilising the data to generate the publication.

The first stage of this methodology, familiarisation of researchers with the data (responses) required comprehensive independent reading of all responses and data (twice) by each researcher independently undertaking the coding of the data. Two primary coders encoded all the transcripts using an inductive thematic analysis methodology, allowing the data to "speak for themselves" without approaching the data with a pre-existing theoretical framework. After familiarisation, one research coder generated an initial set of thematic codes manually, while the other imported de-identified qualitative responses from the student surveys into MAXQDA (v. 18.2.0) Qualitative Software (VERBI Software, Berlin, Germany).

The MAXQDA analysis generated a validated, multi-faceted functionality for thematic analysis of these open-ended responses. Preliminary themes identified using these dual coding processes (manual and MAXQDA) were then compared and discussed between the two research coding staff, with reference to the research team for consistency and clarification of identified themes. The thematic codes identified were then grouped in common themes, reviewed again by the research coders, and defined explicitly. This inductive thematic review comprehensively analysed individual theme responses progressing toward broader combination of common analytic themes. These qualitative data were also independently analysed using Leximancer software (Leximancer Pty Ltd, Brisbane, Australia), to provide additional validation of the MAXQDA and inductive thematic analysis coding and identified themes.

Results

Demographics

Student demographic data for students commencing the BSD program and comparative data referencing the entire Griffith University undergraduate commencing student population over the project timeframe was obtained from Griffith University's Planning and Statistics portal, from which averages were calculated (Table 1).

Overall, the Bachelor of Sport Development cohort included more First-in-family students (64%) and male students (73%: (χ^2 (1) = 36.86, $p < .001$, chi squared test of independence with an Odds Ratio = 3.54; 95% CI: 2.29 to 5.48)) compared to calculated averages across the same institution, 50%, and 43% respectively. Academic performance indicators showed BSD students had lower average entrance scores (13.04) compared to Griffith University commencing students in general (10.46) (see Table 1). Bachelor of Sport Development students were on average younger than the Griffith University cohort (χ^2 (2) = 19.48, $p < .001$) however there was no difference in student status (full-time or part-time) (χ^2 (1) = .27, $p = .603$).

Table 1:
*Student demographic data for commencing Bachelor of Sport Development and Griffith University students (across the entire institution). * Indicates Chi square at 5% significance level.*

	B Sport Development		University	
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender*				
Male	74	73%	9,437	43%
Female	28	27%	12,577	57%
Enrolment				
Full-time	92	92%	19,923	90%
Part-time	8	8%	2,097	10%
Mean Overall Position*	13.04		10.46	
First in Family*	65	64%	10,799	50%
Age*				
≤19 years	83	81%	13,174	61%
20-24 years	16	16%	5,399	25%
≥25 years	3	3%	3,024	14%
International students	3	3%	2,376	11%
First Peoples	8	8%	648	3%

Overall Position (OP) was the tertiary entrance rank used in Queensland during this study. This entrance rank reports secondary student scores, ranging from 1 to 25, where 1 is the highest and 25 is the lowest, distributed according to the bell curve for all secondary students eligible to graduate secondary school in the relevant year. The mean OP represents the overall average of every student's individual OP for Bachelor of Sport Development enrolments.

There was a mixed demographic reported in the two cohorts of students involved in this research including first in family, international and First Peoples students. First in family students are identified as the first student within their immediate family to commence university education. First in family students are a recognised as experiencing increased risk of unsuccessful academic transition to university study and reduced retention. International students are enrolled students identified during enrolment processes as not being born in Australia or holding Australian citizenship. International students are recognised as experiencing increased risk of unsuccessful transition to university study and reduced retention. First Peoples students are enrolled students who self-identify as Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. First People's students are also recognised as vulnerable to experiencing increased risk of unsuccessful academic transition to university study and reduced retention.

Student demographic data for the surveys completed prior to, and at completion of the semester within the same cohorts showed no significant differences, although there were slightly but not significantly fewer responses (Table 2).

Table 2:
Student demographics of BSD students who completed the surveys.

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Gender		
Male	n = 68 (72%)	n = 55 (72%)
Female	n = 27 (28%)	n = 21 (28%)
Enrolment		
Full-time	88 (93%)	72 (95%)
Part-time	7 (7%)	4 (5%)
Age	*M* = 18.6, *SD* = 1.79	*M* = 19.0, *SD* = 2.05

Survey

Orientation experience. Student desire for a career in sport (n=52, 54.7%) and having a passion for sport (n=43, 45.3%) were the predominant reasons for their program enrolment choice. This is illustrated by the student testimonial "*I am heavily involved in sport and felt I would enjoy extending my love for sport into a career".* Students identified information provided on the program itself (n = 30, 31.6%) "*we learnt about the courses and what I will be studying to prepare for my career*", followed by networking opportunities with staff and fellow students (n = 23, 24.2%) "*it was great to meet the staff and students*" as the most frequently reported benefits of orientation in the first survey.

Employment goals. The end of semester survey asked students "do you feel this program will enable you to achieve your long-term employment goals?" with most participant responses (n=62, 81.6%) confirming that the program will enable them to achieve their long-term goals. "*I am passionate about having a career in sport and I am confident this course will help me achieve this*". Only three students (3.9%) responded "maybe"; seven students (9.2%) did not respond. The course was recognised by students to assist them toward future employment (n=39, 51.7%), by covering many topics (n=13, 17.2%), allowing them to get experience or to improve their skills (n=13, 17.2%), and helping them achieve a qualification (n=3, 3.9%) "*I feel this course will increase my general knowledge of sport specific details as well as increase my employability"*.

Student expectations: Pre-semester to end of semester. Student responses from the pre- and end of semester surveys were coded through inductive thematic analysis. The most frequent responses to each question are presented in Tables 3-7. In response to the question "What are you most looking forward to as you commence the Bachelor of Sport Development / have almost finished semester one?", students in the pre-semester survey (Table 3) reported they were most looking forward to forthcoming activities, indicating their mindset was on what they were about to do including improving their skills (n=52, 54.7%) and undertaking hands-on experience including work placement and volunteering opportunities (n=12, 12.6%) "*I can't wait to do work experience to see what's it's like in the industry and develop my skills*". When responding to this question, students were most looking forward to future activities beyond their impending exams including returning to university after the break and upcoming work experience opportunities "*I'm looking forward to the break but then returning and doing work placement and continuing my studies*".

Table 3:
Student responses to "What are you most looking forward to as you commence the Bachelor of Sport Development / after the semester?"

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Learning course content and improving skills	52 (54.7%)	
Work experience / placement	12 (12.6%)	13 (17.1%)
Making connections with peers, staff, and professionals	7 (7.6%)	
Learning more about the degree itself	4 (4.2%)	
Getting back to university next semester		27 (35.5%)
Having a break		26 (34.2%)
Graduating		5 (6.6%)

Student responses to the question asking about what they were least looking forward to are shown in Table 4 and clearly demonstrate that the "unknowns" of workload and associated stress, assessments and different courses were most frequently identified, *"I'm unsure what to expect and worried about being able to juggle everything", "managing my time to complete assessment and the stress of exams".* Further study, returning to study, and the outcomes of their current study were the most frequent responses in the end of semester survey "*getting my results from this semester*", "*getting back into a routine after the break".* Surprisingly, workloads and associated stress and assessments were not identified in responses to the end of semester survey.

Table 4
Student responses to "What are you least looking forward to as you commence the Bachelor of Sport Development / have almost finished the semester?".

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Workload and the associated stress	28 (29.5%)	
Assessment	24 (25.3%)	17 (22.4%)
Specific Courses	8 (8.4%)	7 (9.2%)
Travel	3 (3.2%)	1 (1.3%)
Further study in general		14 (18.4%)
Having to return to university after the break		12 (15.8%)
Seeing their results		6 (7.9%)
Forming bad habits		1 (1.3%)
Difficulties with social interaction		1 (1.3%)

Student responses to the question "What type of assistance do you expect from the lecturers?" (Table 5) underwent a significant shift in thematic responses, transitioning over the semester from improving immediate understanding of content statements pre-semester "*a clear understanding of content and how it needs to be addressed in assessment*" to a greater focus on assessment feedback and targeted clarification of lecture slide content in the end of semester survey, "*I'd like more information about assessment before and after it is submitted*", "*access to clarification about content covered in lectures*".

Table 5:
Student responses to "What type of assistance do you expect from the lecturers during your study / the remainder of the program?".

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Answering of student questions	27 (28.4%)	6 (7.9%)
Clarification / explanation of concepts	21 (22.1%)	
General guidance with course content	9 (9.5%)	
Help with falling behind or English language support	4 (4.2%)	
Uncertainty about or no academic support	4 (4.2%)	
Feedback on assessment		19 (25.0%)
Elaborating on lecture slide content		11 (14.5%)
Similar assistance to what they are already receiving		8 (10.5%)
Consultations with staff		7 (9.2%)
In-depth course guidelines		3 (3.9%)
Assistance for students who are struggling to keep up		2 (2.6%)
Less assistance would be given in the next semester		1 (1.3%)

Students' long-term goals and expectations did not change significantly between the pre- and end of semester surveys, although there was a slight increase in their goal / expectation of employment in a sport related profession (see Table 6).

Table 6:
Student responses to "Please share with us any long-term goals and expectations you may have at this time. For example, once you complete this degree".

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Employment in a sport related profession	58 (61.1%)	57 (75.0%)
Further study	11 (11.6%)	7 (9.2%)
Being qualified	3 (3.2%)	
General self-improvement	2 (2.1%)	
Opening their own business	2 (2.1%)	
Finishing their degree	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.3%)
Connecting with others	1 (1.1%)	
Getting good grades	1 (1.1%)	
Unsure / no long-term goals	2 (2.1%)	2 (2.6%)

Students identified "assessment," "time management" and "study, work, life balance" as the three biggest challenges they experience at university, in both surveys (Table 7). Interestingly, "time management" and "study, work, life balance" remained at similar frequencies in the end of semester survey whereas the challenge posed by assessment (the most frequent challenge identified in the pre-semester survey) was exceeded by motivation which increased from 18.9% to 46.1% "*I think a challenge will be that my motivation levels will start to drop*", "*I am worried about having the motivation to study for my exams*".

Table 7:
Student responses to "What do you expect to be the three biggest challenges you are likely to face at university?".

	Pre-semester survey	End of semester survey
Assessment	73 (76.8%)	26 (34.2%)
Time management	57 (60.0%)	48 (63.2%)
Study, work, life balance	48 (50.5%)	40 (52.6%)
Financial concerns	25 (26.3%)	24 (31.6%)
Stress	24 (25.3%)	23 (30.3%)
Motivation	18 (18.9%)	35 (46.1%)
English language ability	2 (2.1%)	2 (2.6%)
Writing skills		8(10.5%)
Travel		2 (2.6%)
Grades		1 (1.3%)

In the end of semester survey, student perceptions were explored to identify specific strategies or aspects they found supported their academic and employability skill development. When responding to the open-ended question *'Please provide additional feedback about your experience of the employability and academic skill development activities*', students highlighted key activities including 'career planning,' 'networking with industry' and 'assessment support sessions.' It is important to highlight that not all students responded to this question, however the following student testimonials provide an insight into how students perceived key transition strategies.

'*The career plan aided my future direction as it allowed me to understand career opportunities*'.

'*I found that the more assessment around employability that was completed caused me to be more comfortable and excited about my future*'.

'*I had the opportunity to develop connections with professionals and understand the professionalism and skills needed to work in the industry*'.

'*The assessment support sessions gave me an understanding how to organise my study to succeed'.*

'The academic classes were good because they made me look at my available time and make a plan to study and write out all exam requirements to see them clearly laid out.'

'The career planning activity gave me a tool to reflect on my current abilities and what I need to do to be successful in the future.'

Discussion

This study investigated commencing student expectations and how these expectations shifted after experiencing a tailored transition initiative during semester one in the Bachelor of Sport Development program. The clear shift in student expectations reported by BSD students occurred during a period where multilayered transition strategies were deliberately developed and actioned within curricula, informed by a combination of *The Five Senses of Success* (Wilson & Lizzio, 2011)

and the *First Year Curriculum Principles* (Kift, 2009). Specific transition strategies developed and implemented included a focus on the student experience and curriculum, with the objective of building students' *student sense of purpose*, *capability*, *resourcefulness*, *connectedness,* and *identity* (Wilson & Lizzio, 2011) while at the same time accommodating and addressing *student diversity*, *engagement, assessment design, evaluation, and monitoring* (Kift, 2009). As the cohorts' entrance scores were lower than the average at the same university, it was vitally important to deliberately build student capability and resourcefulness into course activities as students transitioned into the university learning environment.

During the early transition phase, assessment was a predominant concern for most students (77%). A key transition strategy aimed at proactively building student capability and resourcefulness during the first semester was the provision of access to an academic skill development series. The academic skill development series was adapted to students' course and program requirements, during which students were taught and practiced academic skills. The sessions and activities were designed to enhance student success and provide familiarity with styles and modes of assessment the students would experience during their first semester. These activities also included general study skills sessions, which supported academic confidence, enhancing the opportunity for academic success. The activities were specifically designed to transition students from their previous educational experiences at high school by incorporating the *First Year Curriculum Principles* (Kift, 2009) to support and recognise that students are diverse and have special learning needs due to their backgrounds, previous experiences, and educational biographies. Upon completion of the academic skill development series, the student concerns regarding assessment fell by 56% to 34% (end of semester). Results from the survey data suggest the tailored academic skill development series contributed to the reduction in student anxiety around assessment expectations and workload.

In contrast to a reduced concern regarding assessment, students communicated their increased concern for maintaining their motivation. This is consistent with previous research that reported students often enter university with heightened levels of excitement and motivation; however, towards the end of the first period of study, realisation of what is required to successfully pass courses may result in reduced levels of motivation (Krause et al., 2005). These findings resulted in scaffolded strategies embedded in subsequent courses, which incorporated regular touch points with students, monitoring and communicating their progress and explicit advice on support and guidance opportunities available within the program and university. Academic staff, senior student mentors and supported creation of student study groups all contributed to the development of sustainable self-support mechanisms. In addition, industry and alumni networking events were included to help students remain focused on the end goal of employment in the industry. These scalable and sustainable activities were designed to support students to overcome periods of reduced motivation and were informed by the *First Year Curriculum Principles* (Kift, 2009).

The employability focussed course and program design provided BSD students with learning, teaching and authentic assessment approaches that promoted student engagement and active learning (Kift, 2009). This design aimed to promote student satisfaction and support students as they transitioned into their studies, contributing to development of their *sense of identity*, *connectedness,* and *purpose* (Wilson & Lizzio, 2011). This study confirmed that the students' long-term goals and expectations to work in the sport industry were maintained and even enhanced by their experience of the employability focussed curriculum within the program, inspiring a future focus. Initial course assessments deliberately engaged students in reflecting, identifying, and planning their future employability skills and experiences to support their long-term goals. Students completed a career focused module, conducted a job search for relevant employment in the field, and developed their own career plan, mapping out required skills or experience and how they would achieve this. This

authentic curriculum and assessment approach, aligned with the *First Year Curriculum Principles – engagement* and *assessment,* may have contributed to development of their *sense of purpose* and *identity* while reinforcing their desire to pursue a career in a sport-related area post-graduation.

It is important to recognise that despite the results of this study highlighting the impact and value of transition initiatives that incorporate employability and academic skill development strategies, the current study has several limitations. Firstly, the students' experience within their courses over the period of this study was influenced by their experience within the courses undertaken during this period. Their experience may have resulted in the potential conditioning of student responses for some questions, such as the type of assistance students expect from lecturers. Furthermore, end of semester survey responses would have been influenced by the satisfaction experienced by students when seeking assistance from the teaching team, mentors, and professional staff throughout the semester. Implementation of a consistent shared vision by the teaching team would influence the self-reported responses. That said, the course and program design used in the BSD program, provided a structured, consistent, and equitable approach to guidance for all students. The teaching and professional team were the same for both cohorts. The absence of a comparison group was also problematic, since the unique combination of an employability focussed program recruiting young student cohorts with such clear demographic differences into a non-professionally accredited program were not possible to match within comparative Health based programs at this university. This increases the challenge of obtaining absolute confirmation of the impact of the employability focussed curricula and assessment and curriculum strategies on the student experience and the support for student success.

Despite these limitations, this research emphasises that implementation of tailored transition strategies encourages students to focus on long term career and employment goals, despite and during the stress and uncertainty of their transition to university. This is critically relevant for educators and institutions recruiting increasingly diverse student cohorts to actively promote planning curricular and program changes to support graduate employability success.

In conclusion, commencing student expectations and experiences, connected with their initial desire for future employment in their discipline of interest, can reinforce both their program selection and their career aspirations. Recognition of the diversity of student cohorts recruited to specific programs should be identified and acknowledged during course and program planning, to optimise successful transition for all students, guiding them toward a more self-reliant, independent learner-centric focused approach to life-long study. The use of transition initiatives focused on building both employability and academic skills within courses contributes to the reinforcement of student confidence in their academic success and vision for future employment.

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