“It’s like a blessing”: A collaborative program to support students on academic probation

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This paper presents a reactive intervention strategy that closes the loop joining individual students at risk, Academic Language and Learning (ALL) advisors, faculty staff and university administrators. Students who have been placed on probation are at imminent risk of dropping out of university. To increase the retention rate of these students, the Academic Skills Program (ASP) at the University of Canberra developed a collaborative program working with other student support providers across the University. Working initially in partnership with student administrative services, the ASP contacted students who had been placed on probation inviting them to attend an individual consultation with a learning advisor. The consultation focussed on identifying students’ needs and developing strategies for improved performance. In many cases students were referred to other support services such as Health and Counselling, the Disabilities Office and faculty-based Learning Resource Centres. In some cases, course convenors were drawn into the mix. The retention rate of students who participated in the program was 15 per cent higher than those who did not, amply providing a financial justification for the program. More significantly, perhaps, a survey of these students showed that they strongly appreciated the concern shown by the University and felt better integrated into the University community as a result of the program.

Key Words: retention, probation, students at-risk, learning development, student support, collaborative practice.

1. Introduction

Over a period of more than two decades during which public funding to Australian universities has declined, access to higher education has expanded. Indeed, Australian universities have experienced an exponential growth in student numbers. International students and domestic students entering universities through special entry schemes and TAFE articulation, often with low university admission scores, are major contributors to this unprecedented growth in student numbers. In this context, it is not surprising that some of these students experience difficulty meeting traditional expectations of academic performance.

Clearly, it is important to put in place inclusive retention policies which provide appropriate support for students to be able to continue with their degrees until completion. Moreover, it is not only the students who will benefit from being given every opportunity to succeed both academically and socially. The institution also gains, by retaining students until the completion of their degrees, as does Australian society, through the resulting contributions of a better-educated population. This paper, therefore, reviews the literature on student retention and
describes and evaluates the process and the outcomes of a collaborative retention program in place at the University of Canberra.

The Retention Program was first conceived as a collaborative pilot project at the beginning of 2008, but, having proved its effectiveness through an evaluative research project conducted during the second semester of the same year, it has now been embedded into University practice. The program aims to follow up students who have been put on probation as a result of failing 50% or more of their study load or failing a particular unit more than once. Although located in the Academic Skills Program (ASP), the Retention Program draws on a collaborative network of academic and student support staff across the university to support students’ learning. Through the Program, students and staff of the University of Canberra have the opportunity of learning together to raise the success rates of students. Above all, the Program offers students on probation the opportunity to improve their chances of success by crossing the boundaries between isolation and inclusion, between confusion and understanding and, ultimately, between failure and success. In the words of one student, the Program was “like a blessing”.

2. Literature Review

Foreshadowing a major change in government policy on higher education in Australia, the Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard (2008) observed in an address to the 6th Annual Higher Education Summit in Sydney:

> Students must not be excluded from higher education on the basis of their socio-economic background, gender, disability, or geography because we need to utilise the stored up capital that resides in every Australian if we are to reach our economic and social goals.

With this view now enshrined in government policy, following the release of the Bradley Review (2008), there is likely to be a dramatic increase in the number of students from non-traditional backgrounds. Such a growth underlines the need, already a pressing one, to broaden the scope of student support services to ensure that students who gain admission to university succeed and complete their courses (Peach, 2005). One way to achieve this goal is through intervention programs designed to increase student retention. This entails identifying the scope of the retention problem and the reasons for students failing to complete their courses. It also entails implementing effective support strategies to keep students from “dropping out”. The problem of retention is exacerbated by the rising number of students with a low University Admissions Index (UAI) or IELTS score, many of whom enter universities through special entry schemes and may be underprepared and ill-equipped for university study. Currently, an estimated 20% of students fail to complete their course of study in Australian tertiary institutions (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008, p. 2). Such a high non-completion rate is a strong incentive for universities to do more to address the problem of student retention.

The literature on student retention encompasses a wide range of descriptors, such as “student persistence” (Jardine, 2005; Wylie, 2005), “engagement” (Ali & Lockstone, 2006; Scott, 2005), “attrition” (Danaher, Bowser, & Somasundaram, 2008), “non-completion” (McCormack, 2005; Taylor & Bedford, 2004), “drop out” (Tinto, 1975), and “at-risk” (Ali & Lockstone, 2006). Similarly, there are varying interpretations of what “student retention” actually means, as it can refer to students who drop out of a unit or course and take up another course, or even switch to another university. One definition describes retention as “the length of time a student remains enrolled at the first institution toward completion of a degree” (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004, p. 4). From an institutional perspective, retention refers to “the policies, actions, strategies and culture of the institution that are designed to keep a student” (Jardine, 2005, p. 22).

Researching and modelling of student retention was initiated in the United States in the 1970s by researchers such as Vincent Tinto (1975). Tinto’s model of dropout behaviour was strongly influenced by Durkheim’s theory of suicide (1961, as cited in Tinto, 1975) which suggests that “suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society” (Tinto, 1975, p. 91). Similarly, in his theoretical model of student retention, Tinto
A collaborative program to support students on academic probation

(1975) postulates that students are more likely to drop out when they are not fully integrated into the social fabric of the academic community. This idea, that student retention requires both academic engagement and social integration into the academic community, remains valid in much of the current literature on student retention. In fact, Tinto’s (2000) more recent modelling of student retention, which has added to the original model, the elements of adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning and external obligation or commitment, effectively summarises the views of many researchers on factors influencing retention. Tinto (2000) identifies five key conditions which support student retention: expectations, relevant learning, involvement, feedback and support. These five conditions figure prominently in the retention literature.

Whether or not the university meets student expectations has been identified as a crucial factor in students’ decisions to withdraw from their courses. Dissatisfaction with the course of study is often cited as the most common reason for dropping out (Danaher, Bowser, & Somasundaram, 2008; Scott, 2005). Yorke (1998, as cited in Danaher et al., 2008, p. 272), in fact, found that three of the four most common reasons given for withdrawal were: “chose wrong field of study”, “lack of commitment to the program”, and “program not what I expected”. Scott (2005; 2008), who used data from the Course Experience Survey, found that staff make a significant difference to the degree of student engagement and learning in almost all aspects of a course. Similarly, Ali and Lockstone (2006) note that courses with high levels of staff involvement have lower attrition rates than courses with low staff involvement. It seems clear that courses that produce learning that is perceived by students to be relevant, with teaching staff who actively seek to engage students and provide timely feedback, are crucial factors in student persistence in these courses.

Research has also pointed to the fact that students must be involved in the academic and social life of the university and feel valued within this culture. Indeed, a sense of belonging is a crucial factor in the minds of students. There is a high correlation between students’ perceptions of inclusion and their intention to continue study (Zimtit, 2003). In a series of focus groups conducted by Victoria University (Morda, Sonn, Ali, & Ohtsuka, 2007), students reported that developing social bonds with peers and a supportive relationship with academic staff were crucial to their adjustment to study in first year. Older students, however, such as those attempting graduate studies, tend to find it more difficult to engage with the university and socialise with younger peers and ultimately have higher dropout rates (DEST, 2004, as cited in Jardine, 2005). A sense of isolation and disengagement from the university has a particularly negative effect on mature age postgraduate students’ chances of completing their studies (McCormack, 2005). Bourassa and Kruger (2001) suggest that student support staff can be instrumental in helping to break down this sense of isolation by assisting students to “view their education holistically and to participate fully in the life of the institution and the community” (p. 36).

Well-developed and integrated support services, necessitating close collaboration, can play a major role in the retention of students. One effective early intervention model involves integrated teams of academic staff, advisors and other staff who meet regularly to discuss students at risk of dropping out and help them obtain “the necessary academic support or counselling to help them be successful students” (Hirsch & Burack, 2001, p. 56). As a 2003 report for Universities UK concluded, “the role of student services is a critical component in student retention” (Jardine, 2005, p. 29). Orientation programs, transition courses and learning support workshops, collectively known as Freshman Seminars in the United States (Tinto, 2000), help students to adjust in their first year of university study. Student services, such as learning centres, health and counselling centres and student loan services, help students to meet the many challenges of academic study, which include, in addition to academic skill development, time and stress management, achieving a work-study balance, and overcoming financial problems; these are all factors which influence student retention.

Despite the considerable body of literature on the factors influencing student retention, there is still a need for individual institutions, such as the University of Canberra, to take the first step
“to gain specific information on their own particular cohorts of students, in order to have an understanding of how these factors may be operating in context” (Jardine, 2005, p. 23). The Retention Program initiated by the University of Canberra as a pilot project in 2008 represented one such step in developing an institution-wide collaborative program. The program draws in support services across the campus to help students identified as “at risk” to persist and succeed in their studies.

3. The Retention Program

3.1. Overview of the Program

The Retention Program, now in its fourth semester, has grown out of a pilot project which identified the particular mix of factors influencing the success of students at the University of Canberra and, consequently, retention by the University. Analysis of the pilot project data, drawn from the student responses during consultations and the subsequent evaluation interviews, provided some valuable insights into the reasons for student non-completion. In addition, the pilot project helped the ASP team to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and to improve the capacity of the team to encourage students to persevere with their studies and complete their degrees successfully. This paper presents an analysis based on data from the Retention Program in 2008, including data from the pilot project.

The students deemed to be at risk were those who had been placed on academic probation, either because they had failed 50% of their study load or had failed a particular unit more than once. In 2008, the total number of students placed on probation was 679 students (360 in Semester 1 and 319 in Semester 2). They were contacted by both letter and text message prior to commencing their studies in each semester and were invited to attend a consultation with a member of the ASP staff to discuss their studies. A total of 248 students responded to either the text message or the letter (113 in Semester 1 and 135 in Semester 2), with 148 students (88 in Semester 1 and 60 in Semester 2) attending the ASP for an initial half hour consultation. At this consultation, with the aid of a successful study checklist (see Appendix A), students reflected on why they had not been successful, identifying the reasons they perceived for their probationary status as well as strategies they could adopt to ensure greater success in the coming semester. This checklist provided a tool for the ASP advisor to identify their needs as well as any follow up strategies that might be required to improve their academic performance.

The consultation was designed to encourage students to take responsibility for their situation and covered the student’s perceptions of the reasons for failure and commitment to strategies to ensure greater success in the coming semester. Nevertheless, a crucial element of the consultation was advice to students on the network of relevant support services across the university which could assist them to meet the particular needs that were identified during the consultation. Students were referred, if necessary, to services such as the Health and Counselling Centre, the Disabilities Office and discipline-based learning resource centres. If appropriate, an appointment was arranged at the time of the consultation. A copy of the checklist was retained by both the student and the academic skills advisor. Records of the consultations were entered into a database of student consultations maintained by the Academic Skills Program and into an Excel spreadsheet. The data from the checklists, together with the records of the students’ subsequent participation in ASP consultations, were stored and analysed.

The factors perceived by the students as contributing to their probationary status were wide-ranging and covered unit-specific difficulties; language, literacy and learning strategies; and personal difficulties such as health and finance. Analysis of the results revealed that the factors most commonly identified as contributing factors were time management, work/study balance, and learning skills, for example essay writing, acknowledging sources, and preparing for exams. In fact, the data show quite clearly that issues such as time management, work/study balance and language and learning skills were frequent factors in student success or failure. Other factors, including motivation, health and well-being and family reasons figured slightly less prominently, but were nevertheless major contributors to failure in the minds of the students.
who attended a consultation. Also significant, as far as the students were concerned, albeit slightly less so, were factors of confidence, adjusting to study, finance, and a general category covering other factors. Although students were sometimes reluctant, several students who had not previously registered with the Disabilities Office identified “disability” as a factor which contributed to their probationary status. Many of these students were unaware of the benefits of registering with the Disabilities Office. In one case for example, a student who had had a shoulder reconstruction did not realise that he could use a note-taker in the exam.

More than half the students who attended the ASP for the initial consultation were referred to a range of services that form the network of student support services across campus. Referrals involved collaboration with university services offering pastoral care such as the Health and Counselling Centre, the Disabilities Office and the Spiritual Meeting Place, as well as services and individual staff offering academic advice. Students were referred for academic advice to the Library, the discipline-based learning resource centres, the Graduate Careers Office, the Dean of Students and the International Student Advisor. In many cases, students were advised to discuss their options with their course convenors.

3.2. Evaluation of the Program

The effectiveness of the intervention by the ASP was measured by comparing the retention\(^1\) and success rates\(^2\) of the students on probation who did and did not attend the ASP for consultation under the retention program. Tables 1 and 2, using statistics produced by the University’s Planning and Statistics Unit, indicate that ASP attendees scored significantly higher on both these measures, suggesting that intervention by the ASP had a significant impact on both the retention rate and success rate of both the Semester 1 and Semester 2 2008 cohorts of students on probation.

In summary, therefore, the figures indicate that the group of students who attended the ASP under the Retention Program, as opposed to the group who did not attend had:

- a higher success rate by more than 10 percentage points
- a higher retention rate by more than 15 percentage points.

Significantly, the group of international students who attended the ASP for consultation under the Retention Program gained a higher success rate and retention rate by more than 15 percentage points.

Table 1: Retention\(^1\) rate of students on probation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort 1 (n = 360)</th>
<th>Retention rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASP Attendees (n = 88)</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP Non-Attendees (n = 272)</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 2 (n = 319)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP Attendees (n = 60)</td>
<td>82.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP Non-Attendees (n = 259)</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP Attendees (n = 148)</td>
<td><strong>80.58%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP Non-Attendees (n = 531)</td>
<td><strong>63.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Retention is defined for this paper as re-enrolling for a subsequent semester.

\(^2\) The success rate is defined as the percentage of units passed in a semester.
### Table 2: Improvement in success rate of students on probation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohort 1 (n = 360)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Cohort 2 (n = 319)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-retention Program</td>
<td>Post-retention Program</td>
<td>Pre-retention Program</td>
<td>Post-retention Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ASP attendees</td>
<td>20.63% (n = 88)</td>
<td>53.41%</td>
<td>30.73% (n = 60)</td>
<td>52.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All non attendees</td>
<td>21.05% (n = 272)</td>
<td>42.69%</td>
<td>20.36% (n = 259)</td>
<td>34.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian ASP</td>
<td>17.79%</td>
<td>49.51%</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian ASP</td>
<td>20.16%</td>
<td>42.18%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-attendees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International ASP</td>
<td>28.21%</td>
<td>70.67%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International ASP</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
<td>55.97%</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-attendees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the figures from Tables 1 and 2, the University’s Planning and Statistics Unit calculated that 25 students (including 7 international students and 18 domestic students) were retained by the University as a result of the Retention Program in 2008. The retention of 25 students represents an annual income of approximately $350,000 to the University.

To further evaluate the results of the Retention Program, a qualitative research project was also undertaken during Semester 2. This was done with ethics committee approval and in collaboration with Dr Coralie McCormack in the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). Students who had attended the ASP for consultations in Semester 1 were again contacted and invited to participate in a confidential, semi-structured interview which aimed to determine whether those who had responded to the initial offer of a consultation found the intervention of the Retention Program valuable. Nine students responded to the request, with eight attending for interview. The participant group comprised four male and four female students and included two international students, six mature age students, four students from language backgrounds other than English, one student with a disability and one Indigenous student. It was, therefore, a sample which included a broad range of the demographic characteristics of the larger group of participants in the program and of the University of Canberra student population more broadly.

The semi-guided questions elicited favourable responses about the retention program from all the participant volunteers. For example, when asked about the effect of the contact with the ASP on his decision to persist with his studies, one mature age student who had initially thought he was “wasting his time at University” responded as follows:

> Now I am confident I am going to pass the course. Now I am even thinking of doing a Masters degree …

Another interviewee, a refugee, brought copies of his assignments to the interview to show that he was now getting a distinction average for his assignments, attributing his improved results to the series of consultations that he had had with the ASP prompted by his initial consultation as part of the Retention Program.
In response to an opening question regarding her feelings on receiving a letter/text message, a third student commented:

Yeah, and I did come here in March ’cause I received the letter, ’cause I thought I got no hope to know what to do and it’s good to see that the university is still helping you to stay and help you out … yeah … it was like a blessing … yeah I thought, you know, like the uni isn’t turning its back on me and it felt, you know, that I’m still wanted …

The overall response to the Retention Program was very positive. Students appreciated the initiative and the collaborative network of support which brought together individual students at risk, Academic Language and Learning (ALL) advisors, faculty staff and university administrators. As to whether it was a good initiative to call students on probation into the ASP to discuss their study, one student remarked:

I think it is a great initiative. ’Cause lots of students who have troubles and stuff don’t actually reach out for help and having the letters sent and knowing there are people there just to come in to talk to I think offers them the chance to get help …

The same student went on to observe:

It actually made me think I should definitely go ahead with studies because of just knowing that there was a good support network there set up for students who are having troubles …

In a similar vein, another student expressed appreciation of the opportunity:

… to learn about the different range of support networks that you guys have here.

4. Discussion

The appreciation of the support networks, expressed above by the student volunteers who were interviewed as part of the evaluation of the pilot project during the qualitative research, is testament to the important role played by collaborative practice in the Retention Program. Indeed, commenting on the US experience, Hirsch and Burack (2001) suggest that student retention is one of several major issues that encourage collaboration by creating natural links between student and academic services. In fact, Hirsch and Burack (2001) also regard collaboration as crucial to student success and retention, not only at the level of the individual institution but also across the tertiary sector. This claim is amply supported by the University of Canberra experience during the Retention Program.

In the case of pastoral care, collaboration with the Disabilities Office and the Health and Counselling Centre involved providing referrals for students to consult the Disabilities Officer, medical practitioners or counsellors for a wide range of pastoral care covering health and well-being issues such as mental health problems. These problems included depression, anxiety, stress, work-study balance and time management issues, lack of motivation/demotivation, family, relationship and personal problems, such as personal loss, financial difficulties and difficulties associated with single parenthood. In some cases, the ASP advisor either made the appointment on behalf of the student or even accompanied the student to the relevant Centre. Other care that forms part of the collaborative network of pastoral care recommended to students during consultations includes that offered by the Spiritual Meeting Place or Chaplaincy which provides sanctuary, “support in times of grief, loss and loneliness” and spiritual guidance through adherents to a wide range of faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

In the case of academic advice, some students were encouraged to attend generic workshops conducted by the ASP on essay and report writing, acknowledging sources, oral presentations and the like. Building on existing collaboration with the library, students were also referred to library workshops on information literacy in such skills as locating sources, finding journal
articles and referencing. In many cases, although they were sometimes reluctant, students were also encouraged to discuss their studies with the relevant lecturer or course convenor, particularly for advice on their course choice, course change, other options for study, and problems with lack of motivation or lack of interest. Such students were often also alerted to the existence of the Careers Office for advice on career options, course content, course choice and course change. In addition, students were referred to a range of discipline-based learning resource centres for assistance, particularly in relation to difficulties encountered with statistics, business statistics, maths, calculations, nursing and law. Subsequently, learning resource centres were established in other disciplines as a result of needs identified during the pilot project.

Although the quantitative results suggest that the practices adopted for the Retention Program enhanced the academic success of some students, it is, in fact, difficult to measure the extent to which the collaborative practice contributed to that success. Privacy legislation requires that the confidentiality of the information provided by students during consultations, not only with academic skills advisors but also with the other staff in the collaborative network, be protected. In effect, without the express permission of the student concerned, confidential personal information cannot be shared. This can create a barrier to collaborative practice between staff working together to promote the personal and academic achievement of individual students. Moreover, it hinders the capacity of staff to co-operate fully in the interest of the student, possibly restricting the potential for success. As many students choose not to follow up on the initial consultation with the academic skills advisors, there is no way of monitoring whether students do, indeed, pursue the referrals suggested. From the students’ point of view, further follow up by ASP staff may well be regarded as an intervention step too far.

Despite possible barriers to collaboration, however, the quantitative and the qualitative results reveal key learning points for students. In particular, they appear to have gained a better understanding not only of their individual study requirements, but also of the university culture and procedures and, more importantly, the university support services which have been drawn into a more collaborative network as a result of the Retention Program. These key learning points can be broadly categorised into five major areas, mirroring the areas which led to the students’ probationary status, including:

- learning more effective time and study management strategies, exam preparation techniques, semester planning, and other time management strategies
- gaining better control of their study projects, for example, selecting more appropriate units and courses
- improving academic literacy: understanding expectations and using sources of information
- understanding the University culture: for example, HECS cut-off dates, student grievance procedures, communicating with lecturers
- becoming aware of other sources of support such as the Health and Counselling Centre, the Disabilities Office, Course Convenors and the Learning Resource Centres.

A significant number of students who sought consultations, including both mature age and international students, were also working 15 or more hours a week and had partners and families, as well as other interests they considered more important than study. All of these factors impacted on their ability to meet the academic demands of their units. This reflects the findings of previous studies. As McInnis and James (1995, 1999, as cited in Jardine, 2005, p. 21) point out, “students no longer fit their lives around university but increasingly expect university to fit around their lives”. This life-study balance, with the current balance for many students favouring life (including paid employment) was a recurring theme in the consultations with students.

Considering the minimal contact some students have with the university, it is not surprising that they are not sufficiently aware of the university’s rules and regulations concerning enrolment and withdrawal from units. Nor are they aware of the consequences of not informing the university administration of their decision to drop out of units, as several of the students we interviewed claimed in their defence. There was also a feeling among students that, at least prior
to the consultations, they felt the university “didn’t care” and did not adequately inform them of procedures and consequences, which tended to reinforce their sense of alienation from the university. This is an area in which universities need to “lift their game” and, as Bowser, Danaher, and Somasundaram (2005, p. 46) aptly put it: “the university has a duty of care towards students that extends to providing full information and conducting thorough consultations” so that students are better informed and feel the university does care. From the initial positive responses of students to the consultations initiated by the Retention Program at the University of Canberra, the University does appear to be moving in the right direction in demonstrating that it cares and in providing a collaborative network of information and support services which encourages students to continue and to succeed in their studies.

Importantly, the Retention Program has also enabled the ASP to gain valuable insights into the reasons why students fail: time management and work-study balance being key factors. However, lack of understanding of the University of Canberra culture and procedures has emerged as another key factor. This information will make an important contribution not only to our understanding of why students drop out, but also to enhanced learning support activities across campus. One of these activities, the Peer Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS), began in Semester 2, 2008; others began in Semester 1, 2009, including the systematic delivery of in-discipline academic literacy tutorials, and the Smart Study Passport, an extended orientation program designed to develop new students’ awareness of essential study skills and the University culture.

5. Conclusion

The Retention Program started tentatively but has now been embedded into practice. The Program is on-going and data gathered from Semester 1, 2009 are still being collated and analysed to determine whether this year’s results continue to support the findings from 2008. Analysis of the data thus far suggests that the results are broadly similar. It seems clear that the intervention by the ASP was appreciated, at least by those students who responded to the initial offer of a consultation with an ASP advisor. This sentiment also emerged consistently during the interviews, with students expressing a sense of relief; it “was like a blessing” that there was a support network at the university to help them.

The collaborative practices of the Retention Program have facilitated the crossing of many boundaries, not only for students, but also for staff. Students have been able to cross the boundaries between their language and culture and the University’s language and culture, between isolation and inclusion and a sense of belonging, between confusion and understanding, and between failure and success. Staff, including academic staff, administrative staff, pastoral care staff and learning advisors, have been encouraged to traverse boundaries which may be impediments to student success. Moreover, learning together through the collaborative practices of the Retention Program has led to an increased understanding of the student experience. This, in turn, has led to improvements in the student experience and the enhancement of student learning. Indeed, as both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest, the Retention Program has contributed to not only the success rate of students, but also the retention rate of the University.

By learning together and crossing boundaries through collaborative practice, the original project team would like to expand the scope of the program through collaboration with other universities in order to gather more substantial data, enhance the success rates of students and improve the retention rates of universities across the sector.
Appendix A: Successful Study Checklist

Have you experienced any difficulties with any of the following categories during your study?

Content (Please specify which unit) __________________
Understanding unit requirements
Communication with the lecturer/tutor
Language (Please explain) __________________________
Learning skills (Please explain) _____________________
Course choice
Motivation / interest
Confidence
Adjusting to study
Time management
Work / study balance
Health and well-being
Finance
Disability
Family
Other (Please specify) ___________________________

What do you want to do now to improve your academic performance?

Talk to my course convener / tutor
Make an appointment with the Academic Skills Program
Attend the Academic Skills Program workshops
Attend Library workshops
Attend the Learning Resource Centre
Make an appointment with the Careers Office
Make an appointment with the Health and Counselling Centre
Make an appointment with the Disabilities Office
Other ________________________________

My next appointment is at ___________________ with ___________________
Date: __________________ Time: __________________ am / pm
Please phone ____________ in advance to cancel or make any changes to your appointment.
References


