**Key Student Transition Message Slides**

A guide for the lecturers and tutors of core transition units within first-year, first semester undergraduate programs

Weeks 1 to 4 are a critical transition-period for new students here at Western. First-year students are often ill-equipped academically and emotionally, hindering their integration and adjustment into university life. Furthermore, new students can easily be affected by ‘information overload’ and important key information can often be overlooked as new students are swamped with material.

Many Western courses and programs see significant attrition between the start of semester and census as new students either have a bad experience here at Western or simply fail to adapt to university-life in general, and drop out or even take up an offer at another university.

The Key Transition Message Slides are an attempt to help smooth the transition into university by providing brief (“just enough”), targeted and personalised (“just for me”), and “just in time” reinforcement of key messages. In turn it is hoped this will help reduce some of the pre-census attrition and help Schools and Units meet load targets. **These Slides are delivered in identified ‘core transition units’ – units within various courses/programs which all new students will take.**

The Slides are specifically designed to be short, brief, and generally consistent across courses and Schools. Nevertheless, any essential and specific School information can be added (e.g. Nursing students need to be reminded to get their vaccinations), but please keep it short and to the point.

The Slides should be displayed at the start (or end) of the lecture/tutorial with the lecturer leading a discussion around the themes of the slide for ten minutes or so. If possible, telling personal stories of your own experience at university can help establish rapport and empathy from the students. In addition, take any opportunity to build peer relationships - having a support network helps students transition to university life much easier and is demonstrated to have a significant impact on student retention. For example, students who have enrolled successfully can help those who haven’t. It can also be helpful to manage expectations - advise students that in general, transitioning to university can be overwhelming (i.e. new culture, new people, new way of thinking, etc.).

You’ll notice some smart-links throughout the Slides. Please add the Slides to the Unit vUWS site to allow students to access the smart-links. It is also very easy for student to access the links during your talk. They only need to write the words after the forward-slash (/) and enter this at the end of the address bar on the University homepage (www.westernsydney.edu.au/).

The University-wide provision of the Key Student Transition Message Slides is part of a number of School level Institutional STaRS strategies from the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning Transformations); all part of the Student Transition Retention and Success (STaRS) Project adopted by all the University’s Schools. For more information please contact Dr Valeria Pashkova, Project Officer (Transition Pedagogies).

The provision of the Key Transition Message Slides directly addresses the central goal of Securing Success: A distinctly student-centred university.

**Week 1 - GETTING STARTED**

Please ask all students if they have completed these activities. If not, they need to make sure they have by the end of Week 1.

1. **Enrol correctly in your units** & check **Tutorial Registration (Allocate+)**. If you need help, ask Student Central or your Academic Couse Advisor

2. **Access vUWS**  & download Learning Guides for all units. **Connect to free Wi-Fi** & **check your Student Email** - [**westernsydney.edu.au**](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/)– then ***Sign Into*** tab

3. Pick up your **Student Diary** from Student Central, a Student Welfare Office or an info stall. Download a Session Planner [**here**](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/counselling_services/are_you_coping_with_study) to help with assessments, reading & study time.

4. **Improve your Academic Literacy or Maths skills** with online resources or attend a skills workshop run before or during session: [**westernsydney.edu.au/workshops**](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CVP%5CDesktop%5CT%20and%20R%20slides%5Cwesternsydney.edu.au%5Cworkshops)**.** Its important students have a realistic understanding of the maths and academic literacy skills expected of them. Encourage students to get ahead or simply bring themselves up to speed by utilising the Study Smart Advisors or MESH.

5. **Tour the Library** if you haven't done so already; it may be worth reminding students how important the Library will become for them. Study Smart Advisors and MESH Rovers can also be found in the Library.

Students may not know who their Academic Course/First-Year Advisors are, and this is a great opportunity to remind them.

Many new students are often intimidated by academics; often it can be the case that academics are the last person that students go to for help – even regarding academic issues!

For this reason it is very important to **encourage help seeking behaviour among new students**. In addition to you, there are plenty of resources available and people to talk to, including Student Central, Ask-us Assistants and School receptions/front desk staff).

If any students come to you for help, you can find information on the [student support website](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities).

**Week 2 – ADJUSTING TO UNIVERSITY LIFE**

By now students should have attended their first full week of classes.

Take a few minutes to see how they are adjusting to university life. Perhaps have small groups discuss and report back on what are their main issues. You could feed information relating to academic issues back to the other members of the teaching team. Remember, if there is an issue you are unsure of then check out the [student support website](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities).

Remind students about the following:

**Tutorials**

Tutorials are where students have the opportunity to meet and establish relationships with their colleagues, and this can help them overcome the loneliness that many students report when they start university. Try to incorporate group activities that support this into your tutorials.

**Navigating vUWS and the importance of Learning Guides**

Ask students how they are finding vUWS and if they are having trouble navigating the site, or understanding what they need to do/read.

Reinforce the importance of accessing vUWS on a weekly basis to get their learning materials and also to receive important/urgent messages about the unit (e.g. staff illness, change of venue, etc.).

When discussing the Learning Guide, go through the assessments and assessment criteria. Students don’t all have the same background knowledge, so some students’ understanding may be very different to both yours and other students.

**Speaking of which; do all Unit tutors have a common understanding of assessment requirements, expectation, and the criteria and standards?**

**Learning Support**

Discuss autonomous learning and the importance of keeping up with weekly readings and material. Encourage student to find out about the [services offered to support students](http://www.uws.edu.au/dvcacademic/dvc_academic/first_year_experience/stars/student_support). Students can get help with IT Mon – Fri, 8am - 8pm and Sat - Sun 9am – 5pm through IT service desk <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/information_technology_services/its/servicedesk>

**The Importance of the Library**

Encourage students to tour the Library and find out about all the services on offer there. They can hire computers, devices, book study rooms, copying, printing, etc. Most key course-textbooks can be accessed in the closed reserve section.

**Week 3 – IMMERSING**

**Questions to ask in Week 3**

Ask students the following questions to see how well they’re settling into their studies:

1. Are they getting into a pattern of study? The [weekly planner](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/counselling_services/are_you_coping_with_study) is a good tool to help.
2. Are they using the range of study tools available within the Online Study Resources? Are they using the free study resources to help (see the slide)?
3. Have they considered to talk with Study Smart advisors in the Library or online? Have they considered attending PASS sessions? **Perhaps a PASS facilitator could be asked to give a brief talk both about PASS and their own personal experiences as a commencing student. A MATES mentor can also help with transition and could also give a brief talk?** Speak to the Project Officer (Transition Pedagogy) Dr Valeria Pashkova (valeria.pashkova@westernsydney.edu.au) if you would like to arrange this.
4. Are they managing their study, work, and personal time effectively? **NOTE: Has the teaching team mapped out when all unit assessments are across the session to improve manageability for students?** Particularly first session, first year.
5. Encourage students to attend the Student Services Fare during Weeks 4 and 5. The event showcases a range of services and programs available to students, and there are also giveaways, prizes and food on offer.

You should be able to find the timetable for the Student Services Fair on their [website](http://www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/services_fair).

Mention the [students’ responsibilities](http://www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/enrolment/student_responsibilities). This includes checking and using their student email account.

**Week 4 – SUCCEEDING**

**Are your students settling into university life?**

By Week 4, students should be starting (or at least thinking of starting soon) their first assessments; but they may also be starting to feel a little overwhelmed.

Are your students on target to complete the first assessment? Discuss and reinforce the assessment criteria and standards (from the Learning Guide) to keep them on track. Consider having small group discussions about the criteria and standards and have them report back as to what they understand them to mean. This way everyone should reach the understanding of what these assessment criteria and standards are.

Don’t forget to mention Study Smart, MESH, PASS and other free study resources.

Are any of your students overwhelmed? Discuss options to manage and succeed in their studies (e.g. reduce their study load, seek academic advice, and talk to a University Counsellor (<https://westernsydney.edu.au/counselling>). Advise student to talk to the School First Year Advisor (or equivalent) for guidance and advice.

You can also advise students to complete **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY MODULE** to learn about referencing & how to avoid plagiarism & collusion. The module will become compulsory for all students in 2019. In Spring 2018, it is voluntary but is a great resource. To preview the module, see [here](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/learning_futures/home/teaching_transformation/teaching/academic_integrity/where_do_i_go_for_help_with_academic_integrity/academic_integrity_module).The module is available for all students via the Study Smart vUWS site. All students have access to this course site. For more information, please contact the Library Academic Literacies team libal@westernsydney.edu.au

**Census Date**

[Census date](http://www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/dates/census_dates) is the official date by which students must finalise their enrolment and fees each session. This includes dropping units, varying their study pattern, paying fees upfront or deferring their fees. Census Date is different each year for each Semester and can be found [here](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/dates)

**If a student changes their enrolment after this date they will still be charged a fee AND receive a grade for all units they were enrolled in at census date, regardless of whether they continue to attend.**

Encourage students to seek academic advice before making a decision about changing their enrolment.

And finally; remind students again that census date is approaching

**Week 5 – Census Date**

This week’s slide is about Census Date.

Please remind your students that it is the official date for their enrolment and fees to be finalised. It is non-negotiable.

Advise your students:

1. To carefully read information about Census Date here: [**westernsydney.edu.au/census**](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/census)
2. To ensure they have gone through the Census checklist –

By the census date for your teaching session, you need to:

* make sure you're happy with your units and want to continue studying every unit you're enrolled in
* have either provided your TFN (if you're eligible to defer your tuition fees) **or**
* have paid your fees in full. Payments cannot be accepted after this date
1. To check their emails or My SR (MyStudentRecord), if they are unsure whether they provided correct TFN or paid their fees – all students who haven’t provided TFN or paid their fees are contacted before Census via email or phone.
2. Remind students that if they haven’t provided the correct TFN or paid their fees, they will be automatically disenrolled from their units after Census and unable access vUWS and submit their assignments.
3. If students have any further questions, they should contact Student Central as soon as possible – via phone, in person or via online chat.
4. If a student is thinking of dropping out, encourage them to seek support and talk to University Counsellors: westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/counselling

**Week 6 – First Feedback and your Progress**

Week 6 is the first week after the Census date and more than one third of the Semester has passed. We suggest that at this stage, it may be helpful to discuss the following two issues with students:

1. Importance of acting on their first feedback on assessments/quizzes and tracking their progress
2. What happens after the Census date.
	1. You may wish to talk to students about the importance of tracking their progress in units and seeking help proactively. The key indicator of their progress can be tutors’ feedback on their first written or oral assessment (or in some units, it may be results of their first quiz(zes)).
* If students are unsure how they are doing in a unit, encourage them to seek additional feedback from their tutors. Apart from other benefits, this conversation can help students build rapport with their tutors.
* Use this week’s Transition slide as an opportunity to talk to your students about why feedback is important. It is the compass of how they are progressing in each of their units. It helps identify their strengths as well as areas/skills/topics they need to pay more attention to and put additional efforts into. Help your students to see feedback as a positive thing and an opportunity to learn, even if feedback and marks are not what they expected.
* Talk about importance to act on feedback early in the Semester and proactively seek help, if students feel that they are falling behind, don’t understand content or lack certain skills. More generally, you can ask students what it means to be a proactive learner and why active learning is a good learning strategy. The Transition slide offers some strategies for accessing authorised help. You can add other strategies of proactive learning and help-seeking as relevant to your course and unit.
	1. The Census Date is the official deadline for finalising enrolment and fees for each teaching session: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/dates/census_dates>

After this date, students are responsible for fees/HECS debt and will receive grades for all their units (even if they decide to discontinue). However, if there are extenuating circumstances, they might be able to withdraw without academic penalties after Census – to discuss their options, students are advised to talk to Student Central. If students haven’t not provided a correct Tax File number or paid their fees by the Census date, they will be discontinued from their units. If they intend to continue their studies, they will have to pay their fees in full by a certain deadline – to organise it, they need to talk to Student Central as soon as possible (otherwise, they won’t be able to continue their studies, access vUWS and submit assessments).

**Week 7 – WHEN THINGS GET DIFFICULT – SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE**

This week, we can remind students about support, help and strategies available if they experience non-academic issues that may affect their studies. According to the Western Sydney University’s exit surveys and the QILT national survey, the majority of students who withdraw from their studies prematurely, do so due to non-academic factors (health including mental health, financial pressures, family, work, etc).

These challenges can be particularly discouraging for students who are first in family to attend university. As educators, our responsibility is to openly talk about these challenges and barriers, make students aware of existing support services and programs, and encourage them to be proactive in seeking help. You can emphasise to students that they are not alone in times of difficulties and that there are support services in place to help them. It is important to access support services as soon as possible if things get difficult.

The Transition slide for this week introduces the two key messages:

1. What to do if students can’t submit an assessment on time due to extenuating circumstances

Encourage students to familiarise themselveswith ***Special consideration and the Request for extension guidelines.***

Remind students that if they can’t submit an assessment by the due date due to serious misadventure, accident or extenuating circumstances beyond their control, they may be eligible for a special consideration or an extension for assessment. You can show this short video about Special Consideration: <https://youtu.be/eFTu2nMn3J0>

More info is available here: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities/special_consideration2>

Key things to remember: ***Special consideration and Request for extension guidelines.***

1. Secure supporting documents (e.g. medical certificate) if extenuating circumstances occur
2. Apply no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after the due date of the assessment task
3. Apply online or in person at Student Central and always attach supporting documents

**Support services and programs available:**

The slide lists support services and programs that students are encouraged to access. The central student info line can connect students to all these services and provide further info: **1300 668 370**

1. Community of learners – supporting each other in learning

[credit to John Hayek, Associate Lecturer, School of Business – Marketing]

By Week 7, students are likely to have been placed in groups/teams for a group assessment in at least one of their units. They also start noticing that they share several tutorials with the same students. It is important to encourage students to form connections and networks with their peers which can support them throughout their studies. As research show, social networks and social capital are key to human happiness and wellbeing. A great amount of learning happens not through formal education settings but through our informal networks and connections.

Hence our message – collaborate with your group members or with peers in your tutorials/workshops, share your learning with them and don’t be shy to ask them if they can assist you by answering your question, explaining a difficult point or sharing a lifehack. You will be surprised how much more you can learn together. Let’s start supporting each other, as your tutors continue to support you.

**\*Please emphasise to students that they must not cross the boundary between supporting each other and colluding, which is academic misconduct. Collusion and cheating can occur when students share with others their assessment drafts or full tutorial/lecture notes, when they copy from each other’s assignments, when they write a full assignment or its fragment, do a quiz or solve a mathematical problem for another student, and so on. Hence our message: actively participate in group assignments/assessments and support your peers, where possible, but avoid collusion with others on tasks and activities which are meant to be entirely your own work**

A simple thing that students can do to start forming connections with their peers is to ask: “Are you OK with your studies?” You can give students a few minutes for an in-class activity:

* Turn to a person sitting in the same row – someone you haven’t spoken to before,
* Introduce yourself and ask “Are you OK with your studies?”,
* Reflect on whether your learning experiences have been similar or different to the person you have spoken to.

**Week 8 – Staying on track &
Intra-session break**

This is the last week prior to the intra-session break. We suggest focussing on the following messages for students:

1. The importance of staying on track with your studies and knowing the signs when you start falling behind
* What to do if you are not on track
* Withdrawing from a unit after Census - **important changes in progression policy**
1. Planning for your intra-session break
2. Reminder about Academic Integrity (separate slide)

Here are some suggestions re: how to convene these messages:

1. The slide lists the main signs of **staying on track with studies**. If possible, talk about these signs in relation to a specific unit you teach so that it makes more sense to students.

The key message to students is “Take action promptly if you realise that you are falling behind!” The slide lists simple steps that we encourage students to take in this case. In some cases, it is not too late for them to catch up with assessments and content with support from their tutors and Study Smart advisors.

If after talking to tutors and a counsellor/student welfare, students realise that they are not in a position to catch up with their studies and they take an informed decision to discontinue a unit after the Census, it is highly recommended that they withdraw before 21st September. According to the new progression policy (in effect from 1st September 2018), if students withdraw within three weeks after Census (this Semester, this deadline falls on 21st September), they will not receive a fail grade. However, tuition fees will be still charged.

If students withdraw from a unit after 21st September, **both** a fail grade will be recorded ***and*** tuition fees will be charged.

As this is a new policy, please put a particular emphasis on this change. If students have any further questions, please refer them to Student Central on campus or 1300 668 370.

1. **Intra-session break.** Encourage students to plan strategically for the upcoming intra-session break (see some tips on the slide). If you have time, you can ask students for their favourite tips.
2. **Academic Integrity Reminder** (located on a separate slide). Given that major assessments will be due soon, we are reminding students about studying with academic integrity, the main types of academic misconduct and their consequences.

In Western Sydney University, we take an educative approach to academic integrity that seeks to inform, educate and support students for doing the right thing and succeeding with integrity.

In line with the educative approach, our message is that students share responsibility with staff for their learning, which includes the responsibility for knowing what academic misconduct is and how to study with academic integrity. The slide is divided into two parts: on the left, we listed good academic integrity practices and resources for students, on the right – types of academic misconduct and possible consequences/sanctions.

Ideally, this slide is to be discussed in the context of your specific course, discipline and professional area – e.g. what does academic integrity mean in nursing/computing/science/social work/business/arts, and so on? How is academic integrity related to professional life beyond university – how does it matter for professional ethics and hence success of students’ future careers?

***Further activities on academic integrity:***

We encourage all academic staff to undertake more in-depth activities and discussions around academic integrity in their classes. For ideas and resources, check our Academic Integrity website: <https://westernsydney.edu.au/academic_integrity> The website has a collection of **Resources** for educators**, including in-class resources and activities on academic integrity:**  <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/academic_integrity/resources>

You can also check our blog post *Six strategies for growing students’ academic integrity*: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1444191/Six_Ideas_for_Developing_Academic_Integrity_in_Students.pdf>