

The WPO ‘Pivot’ – Shifting Widening Participation Outreach activities to a remote learning environment

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES IN ONLINE LEARNING

- You can find them on the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education [website!](#)

ABOUT OUR OUTREACH MENTORS

- Our Outreach Mentors are current University students who have attended one of our Outreach partner schools or are from targeted equity backgrounds;
- The mentors undergo a rigorous recruitment process that includes:
 - Application addressing selection criteria;
 - Group Interview.

Our recruitment process is undertaken in a supportive environment, where students are provided with feedback as a professional development opportunity.

- We employ over 100 Outreach Mentors as casual employees of the university across our six UOW campuses (Bega, Batemans Bay, Shoalhaven, Wollongong, Southern Highlands and South-Western Sydney);
- Outreach Mentors are matched with high school students based on areas of future study interest (i.e. aspiring Engineering with university students studying engineering) and their availability around their existing university commitments;
- As per our agreement with the Department of Education and Catholic Education Office, our mentors undertake self-paced training modules, as well as undergoing two days of formal training, plus a detailed briefing on the programs that they are allocated to. Training includes the following topics:
 - Mandatory Reporting and Child Protection;
 - Cultural Awareness Training delivered by members of our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Refugee communities;
 - Presentation and communication skills, including developing their story about their educational journey;
 - Group facilitation skills, including the development of group dynamics;
 - Insights into pathways options, career planning and university degree offerings.

ABOUT OUR TEAM

- We currently have 6.6 FTE staff employed at our Wollongong campus, with a further 2 FTE employed at our Regional and Metropolitan campuses.
- The team is split into three sub-teams:
 - Regional and Metropolitan staff who have responsibility for developing relationships and delivering programs with schools in regions around our UOW campuses;
 - Outreach program staff who design, deliver and evaluate programs for students in Year 2 to Year 10 with a strong focus on parent engagement;
 - Widening Participation program staff who work with Year 11 and 12 students, as well as our non-school leaver cohorts through to their gap year.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN OUR YEAR 12 UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM

- We are only five weeks into the program, but so far student engagement in our Year 12 University Preparation is higher than we have experienced in our face to face program. To date, 97.4% of students have been retained in the program. Typically, over the course of the Year 12 University Preparation Program approx 78% of students would complete the face to face program.
- Students are expected to commit to the following each week:
 - 22.5 hours of interaction with mentors/university staff
 - The completion of 15 self-paced modules via Moodle
 - 80% attendance at program ‘lectures’ or mentor sessions
 - Strong interaction throughout the program with fellow students and mentors, particularly as part of the Mentor breakout sessions
 - 30mins of engagement with HSC4Me for HSC subject support in the final 9 weeks of the program
 - Uptake of our Super Study Week options including a mock HSC English exam (Advanced/Standard/EALD) and information sessions about pathways, degree choices, Early Admission, and UAC admissions

ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR OUR YEAR 12 UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM

- We use a combination of Zoom, Moodle (Blackboard) and a private Facebook group to engage students in the Year 12 University Preparation Program;
- Schools were very supportive of us using these platforms for the following reasons:
 - Parental permission is sort and provided to allow students to engage in these platforms when they register for the Year 12 University Preparation Program;
 - Students are enrolled as UOW students throughout the program so they have access to our Moodle Platforms. This provides an additional layer of support to students throughout the HSC as students can access the university support services as well as library research platforms;
 - All Zoom sessions are recorded for child protection purposes and the discussion platforms that allow for engagement between the mentors and the students are moderated by UOW staff.
- When students registered for the Year 12 University Preparation Program we asked students what access they had to digital technology. We are prepared to respond to student needs in the following ways:
 - Laptop grant;
 - Providing a wireless dongle;
 - Providing access to one of our local campuses for students to have a safe space to study.

EVALUATION OF THE YEAR 12 UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM

- Our evaluation of our Year 12 University Preparation Program has been guided by UOW’s HEPPP Evaluation Framework that has been developed by Professor Sarah O’Shea and Professor Steven Howard;
- In previous years, we were using the following data collection methods to evaluate the Year 12 University Preparation Program;
 - Pre-Survey
 - Post-Survey, directly after the program
 - Follow up interview, 6 months post program completion.
- Whilst we have retained these data collections methods for 2020, we have also introduced weekly pulse checks. It is harder to ‘read the room’ in an online environment, so students complete 4 short questions at the end of every UPP session to monitor their progress;
- We also use the attendance feature in Moodle to track student attendance and progress in real time.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE YEAR 12 UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM

- We have typically found parental engagement a challenge in our WPO programs. However, some strategies that have worked in the Pre-COVID world included:
 - Students completing an activity in their WPO program, writing to their parents inviting them to our parent engagement strategies;
 - Tying in parental engagement activities into ‘showcase’ evenings/graduation type events for students who have participated in WPO programs;
 - Incentivising parental engagement in our school holiday programs by offering free vouchers to our Early Start discovery centre after their attendance.
- We have found that we have increased parental engagement in our Year 12 University Preparation Program. Whilst we are currently undertaking research to find out why that is, our anecdotal feedback is:
 - Offering parental sessions online have allowed parents to engage with parents in the comfort of their homes;
 - We are offering these sessions from 7pm onwards and encouraging parents to bring a wine, beer or cup of tea with them!
 - Parents are feeling generally more concerned this year and are wanting to be informed about the post-school options available for their child given the current uncertainty they have experienced in Year 12.

THE FUTURE OF THE YEAR 12 UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM

- In the short-term we are monitoring Department of Education advice regarding incursions and excursions within the school environment. We would obviously love to get the students onto campus in Term 3 or at least get our mentors out into schools to meet with their students. At this stage, we are planning for a remote online delivery for Term 3, with ‘fingers crossed’ for some opportunities to engage face to face.
- In the longer term we are very open to a blended delivery model as we have seen the value, in terms of student engagement and inclusion, of offering our programs online. Essentially though, it is too early to make a call. We want to ensure that we deliver our 2020 program to the highest standard and then seek the feedback of the student participants and schools to co-design what future iterations of the Year 12 UPP look like.

TRANSITIONING STUDENTS INTO UOW

We have also moved a number of our Transition activities into a remote learning environment at UOW during this period. Check out our websites for future information about some of our programs!

- Short-course enabling program [“UniNOW”](#) for students who just miss out on a university offer;
- [Pre-Commencement Bridging Programs](#) for students to brush up on their university skills and foundational knowledge before they start their degree;
- [First Gen program](#), which supports first in family students to make the transition into university;
- [Student financial assistance](#), some initiatives have been developed in response to COVID-19 to address the significant need students are currently experiencing at UOW.
- [Exit and re-engagement programs](#) for students who have only partially completed their university studies.
- Just to name a few!

