

Transition to Higher Education

Although transition, at first glance, appears to refer to the transition of a student from a secondary or FE setting to an HE institution, in reality it is much less straightforward. Therefore providing a student with a successful transition relies on a variety of participants who collectively help a student to become familiar with, engage in and succeed within a programme of study. Issues affecting transition within the biosciences can be unique, but many are applicable to a variety of sciences and other subjects. This guide is intended to be an introduction to assisting higher education teaching and learning practitioners with transition.

The Centre for Bioscience helped to promote the **STAR (Student Transition And Retention) Project**, an FDTL4 (Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning) project, that aimed to 'identify, analyse, disseminate and uptake examples of good practice in supporting students during periods of rapid transition from one learning environment to another with an underlying aim to increase student retention.'

The case studies, booklets, reports and papers produced by the STAR Project are some of the best collections in the UK of work regarding these issues. Many of these examples highlight relevant examples in the biosciences. www.ulster.ac.uk/star/index.htm

The STAR booklets can be viewed at www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/drafts.htm

STAR Project Booklets:

- Guidelines for the Management of Student Transition
- Student Transition and Retention
- Informing Students: Community Outreach
- Supporting Students:
 1. Tutorial Support
 2. Early Induction
 3. Extended Induction
 4. Special Needs
 5. International Students
 6. Though Course Design
- Students Supporting Students: Student Mentoring
- Informing Students: Quality Information



Specific to retention: 'A Practical Guide to Retention - Updated' can be viewed at: www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/SURetentionGuide0807.pdf

“... the reality of the event was nowhere near as frightening as the anticipation and helped by a ‘buddy’ that I met at the mature student induction day” Sue Willis, 3rd year student

Student Transition Guidelines

Prior to entry

- Accurately portray any information a student should expect to know about an institution (campuses and courses);
- Promote good communication links between the teachers, careers advisors and others involved in a student’s progression to university; and
- Provide students from less traditional pathways opportunities to have additional experiences prior to the beginning of courses.

Induction

- Activities should help students become familiar and knowledgeable of the academic and area communities;
- The academic obligations of both students and staff should be transparent;
- Support examples of appropriate and suitable study habits;
- Provide a foundation for a social experience leading to communities of practice;
- Establish and practice good communication between staff and students; and
- Consider induction strategies for other periods away from the institution (e.g. work placements).

Curriculum development

- Courses should be designed to be relevant and provide students with possible vocational choices;
- Provide students with a smooth transition which includes an understanding of previous learning experiences;

- Assess students early in the course, providing formative feedback making certain students understand the required standards throughout; and
- Make sure students understand the importance of attending all teaching sessions and commit to attending.

Staff development

- Provide staff with support systems which allow the development of appropriate curricula;
- Knowledge of student support services by staff is as important as subject knowledge; and
- Be aware of your own successes and pitfalls in assisting with student transition and willingness to share outcomes with others.

Adapted from the ‘Guidelines for the Management of Student Transition’ from the STAR Project (www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/star_guidelines.pdf).

Science Learning and Teaching Conference



Find out what other practitioners like you have tried, with helping students make the transition into the sciences. A variety of lecturers shared their experiences at the 2007 Science Teaching and Learning Conference. The proceedings contain various papers focused on transition issues under ‘The Secondary/Tertiary Interface’ section beginning on page 134.

www.sltc.heacademy.ac.uk/proceedings.htm



Suggestions for Working with 1st Year Students

First Year Seminar Strategies

- Have **staff participate in the activities** students are to do at various stages of site visits, induction activities or as a first year student. It is one thing to teach something and another to experience it. Staff benefit from the exercise by seeing both the benefits and problems with each activity, and are better able to understand the why's and how's of an assignment. It can be surprising how much staff learn from the campus tour.
- Try a **project-based learning activity** with students, for example, planning an orientation programme for future incoming first years. This encourages them to bring together key points from teaching activities and also research student support services. Allow for some creativity in how a student presents the content (PowerPoint, creating brochures, videos, audio, social networking sites).
- Have **students write letters to incoming first year students** which are written outside of teaching time, sealed, kept confidential and given out in the first tutorial or to new students the summer prior to starting. The lecturer never sees the contents unless the recipient volunteers to read a letter to the class.
- At the end of term, close with a **“who cares” exercise**. Students bring in an object that symbolises a memorable experience they are taking with them from the class. If time allows have a show and tell on that last day.

These strategies were compiled from various listserv messages from the First Year Experience Discussion List. For more information please visit: www.sc.edu/fye/listservs/index.html

Other suggestions

- Review the **STAR (Student Transition and Retention)** Project resources - perhaps what you wanted to better understand or work on has already been tried and tested (www.ulster.ac.uk/star/index.htm);
- Be aware of new **students' previous learning experiences**. Familiarise yourself with the latest A level or other qualification requirements for your subject area (www.directgov.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/index.htm);
- Know the **types of assessments** new students have experienced in their secondary setting. Students may need time to adjust to the types of assessment used in HE if they are unfamiliar;
- Be a positive resource for your students knowing that students entering HE can be lacking in self confidence;
- Familiarise yourself with the warning signs of 'at-risk' students (www.ulster.ac.uk/star/induction/extended_induction.htm); and
- Provide adequate assessment to inform students on their progress within their first 8 weeks.



Further resources

Websites

Centre for Bioscience web pages on the issues of induction, transition and retention. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/themes/itr.aspx

WIRE - Wolverhampton Intellectual Repository and E-Theses - open access repository that serves as an excellent starting point in the search for information on transition. wlv.openrepository.com/wlv/

National Statistics publication headline information is provided for all UK countries and the UK as a whole. www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1100/161/

Widening participation and disability information highlights transition into employment and higher education. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/employability/wp.aspx

Scottish Enhancement Themes publication, 'Staying There: Transition and the First Year' (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/Guide_Staying_There_Home.asp) and a comprehensive listing of worldwide resources devoted to the first year theme (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/Links/default.asp#FirstYear).

Universities UK publish a variety of materials centred on many issues around the Student Experience. <http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/show/?category=6>

The Higher Education Academy has many documents and reports on the topic of first year students, retention, transition and student engagement. Go to: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources and search for 'first year' or other topics.

Projects

Centre for Bioscience Projects

- Improving levels of literacy in science undergraduates. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/currentprojects/jones.aspx
- Analysis of student absenteeism in first year biology students. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/projects/pearce.aspx
- Combining 'Peer' and 'Online' assessment methods for large-class laboratory practicals to enhance the effective feedback to and learning experience for students. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/currentprojects/grady.aspx

External Projects

- Change Academy (HEA) project with London Southbank University to improve the student experience and improve retention. www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/change_academy_london_southbank_university_2005

Publications

Grundy S. (2008) Successful Transition. Bioscience Bulletin issue 23:2. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/newsletters/bulletin23.pdf

Abt G. and Barry T. (2007) The Quantitative Effect of Students Using Podcasts in a First Year Undergraduate Exercise Physiology Module, Bioscience Education e-journal, vol 10:8. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol10/beej-10-8.htm

Scott J. and Grall M. (2007) Student Failure in First Year Modules in the Biosciences: An Interview Based Investigation, Bioscience Education e-journal, vol 10:c2. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol10/beej-10-c2.htm



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