



Responding to diverse student needs to create inclusivity: a narrative of academic support in a remote dual-sector university

Key Words

diversity, inclusivity, academic development, bespoke preparatory programs, reflective practice

Abstract

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is uniquely positioned in the Northern territory, Australia, to provide a responsive and relevant academic and cultural experience for Indigenous Australians, domestic students from non-traditional backgrounds and international students from developing countries. The Academic Language and Learning Success Program (ALLSP) team, as part of CDU, delivers support to all students but recognises that the diverse groups arriving at university have different pre-entry requirements in terms of academic skills development. This means that a one-size-fits-all generic approach to academic preparation does not provide adequate academic grounding to all students. The ALLSP team believes that customised academic skills programs, delivered at an optimal time and aligned to specific student needs, are required to achieve equity and social justice. This presentation details how bespoke programs have been designed and delivered in collaboration with academics and support services for Indigenous students, International Awards Students and International Master of Engineering students. The pedagogy underlying these programs is active learning; students are challenged with hands-on learning opportunities and ongoing informative feedback, thus maximising student engagement. Each of these programs provides students opportunity to advance their competency in written and spoken academic language while promoting critical thinking - skills essential to ensure equity and improve student success at university. The ALLSP team members are committed to ongoing reflection on their teaching practice and its impact on learning (Hattie, 2009; Schneider & Preckel, 2017). We identified that generic delivery of study skills did not reflect CDU's vision of being a provider of transformative skills and global learning; thus we redeveloped our programs to ensure our students can integrate into the demands of a privileged curriculum. To achieve this inclusivity, a bespoke approach to study skills' support is necessary to ensure our demographically diverse students achieve academic integration. The design and delivery of these tailor-made intensive academic skills programs demonstrate that through continuous reflective practice on student learning and teaching, social justice and equity can be better achieved.

References

- Hattie. J. (2009) *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (1st ed.) New York: Routledge
- Schneider, M., & Preckel, F. (2017). Variables Associated With Achievement in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Meta-Analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1-36.