



Serving the Solomons: Overcoming structural and cultural factors

Key Words

transition, tertiary study, ESL, culture, Solomon Islands

Abstract

Many universities, including the Australian Catholic University (ACU), offer on-campus transition programs for specific student cohorts (McInnis, 2003). However, students who study fully online or off-shore may also need assistance (Lambrinidis, 2014). The Academic Skills Unit (ASU) has recently been involved in a program that required a different approach to student support for students studying off-shore in the Solomon Islands. In November 2015, the ASU was approached by Executive Education at ACU and asked to collaborate with them in their Graduate Certificate in Business Administration for the IRD (Inland Revenue Division) leadership program in Honiara, Solomon Islands. One of the concerns was that most participants came from a background with limited or no experience in tertiary studies and all students were ESL speakers. Thus, a transition program "Preparation for tertiary study" was designed by the Academic Skills Unit in collaboration with a subject lecturer to provide students with the opportunity to further develop their academic literacy skills. This was to involve a 4 day face-to-face intensive in Honiara conducted by an Academic Skills Advisor and the unit lecturer. This program was embedded within the discipline and incorporated content from the first unit in the Graduate Certificate in Business Administration and support for the assessment tasks. The program design further took into consideration cultural learning preferences as well as structural issues. One of the structural concerns was the limited access to the internet. This meant that the face-to-face program could not make use of the University's online learning environment (LEO), but instead needed to rely on other forms of support, such as workbooks and provision of interactive resources (normally to be found on the ASU LEO page) on USBs. ASU offers ongoing support for individual students and the group as a whole. The participants have succeeded in their studies so far and have formed study groups who are in regular contact with ASU. In collaboration with Executive Education, ASU has proactively responded to the needs of this unique student cohort by embedding the development of academic literacy skills within their degree and using context appropriate resources.

References

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