

Title: **The Student Perspective on Enhancing their Experience of, and Engagement with, their Studies**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Appreciate the range and variety of expectations, uncertainties and aspirations that students enter university with – through hearing the voice of the students.
- Gain a critical insight into the underlying influences on student expectations and aspirations
- Assess to what extent initial experiences at university match with student expectations and the students' views of the consequences of this on their engagement.
- Debate the extent to which we as university staff should meet expectations that may create tensions with our values and beliefs.
- Consider their own practice and policies the light of the analyses of this evidence.

Session Outline

We have been researching the issue of student engagement for some years. Initially we gathered evidence from students about their perspectives on learning and teaching and this highlighted the critical importance of their level of engagement with their studies (Bryson and Hand, 2007a). Our conception of engagement encompasses the perceptions, expectations and experience of being a student and the construction of being a student. This earlier work led to collaborations with others and an examination of ways of enhancing engagement (Hand and Bryson, 2007) and to further research on staff perspectives (Bryson and Hand, 2007b). We have identified a number of key influences on engagement. Salient among these influences is the extent to which students perceive that their expectations are being met. The first year at university is a transition which many students find difficult (Krause et al, 2005) and during which there is considerable potential for alienation (Mann, 2001).

We wish to report on our most recent research. This involves a longitudinal study on thirty students in two university schools. There is also parallel work being conducted by colleagues in two Australian universities. This study is ongoing and we will report on the first two interviews with each student during their first year. This provides rich accounts of their educational history and life context and changing aspirations and expectations. We have included a focus on intellectual development (Perry, 1970; Baxter Magolda, 1992) with the intention of examining the relationship between intellectual development and engagement.

We intend our emphasis on the individual student's perspective to bring out the diversity, complexity and dynamic nature of expectations and viewpoints (Haggis, 2004). We shall draw on this evidence from the students to raise discussion points around the learning outcomes of the session.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

20 mins for presenting evidence and raising issues for discussion, these are:

Does our evidence and our interpretation of that concur with delegates' experience and views?

To what extent *do* we currently address student expectations?

To what extent *should* we meet student expectations – what are the implications if we do?

To what extent *can* we meet the variety of expectations that students have?

25 mins for group discussion

References

Baxter Magolda, M. (1992) *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Bryson, C. and Hand, L. (2007a) The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning, *Innovations in Teaching and Education International*, 44(4), pp349-362.

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Haggis, T. (2004) Meaning, identity and 'motivation': expanding what matters in understanding learning in higher education?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 29, 3, 335-352.

Hand, L. and Bryson, C. (2007) *Aspects of student engagement*. SEDA Special, London, forthcoming

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Mann, S. (2001) Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: alienation and engagement, *Studies in Higher Education*, 26, 1, 7-19

Perry, W. (1999) *Forms of intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: a scheme*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.