

Centralised Faculty Student Services: is it Possible to Offer an Enhanced Student Experience and Maintain Connection with Faculty Stakeholders? The Sequel!

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David Donnelly has worked in the higher education sector for over 20 years. David's first role in higher education was to oversee the implementation of HECS back in the late 1980s. Since then he has held a variety of roles at the University of Newcastle including Faculty Registrar in several Faculties, Change Coordinator in the project team overseeing the implementation of the Oracle Peoplesoft student system in the early 2000s, and Manager of Student Administration. David is currently the Deputy Academic Registrar for Governance and Academic Administration.

At the 2010 TEM Conference in Melbourne, the Deputy Academic Registrar at the University of Newcastle presented a paper titled *Centralised Faculty Student Services: is it Possible to Offer an Enhanced Student Experience and Maintain Connection with Faculty Stakeholders?* The paper focused on the views of staff to changes in structure and methods of delivery of student services, particularly in the way Faculty services were delivered following a significant restructure of student services in 2007. The move to a shared services model was explored.

At this year's conference, the Deputy Academic Registrar will provide an update on what has transpired with the evolution of student services at the University over the last two years. 2012 is likely to be a dynamic year at the University of Newcastle with a new Vice-Chancellor signalling significant change. Will the shared services model survive? Will staff largely serving Faculties remain in the Student Hubs? Have the attitudes of staff changed since 2010 where their views were presented to the TEM Conference by way of a survey?

Background

In 2007, The University of Newcastle introduced four Student Hubs as the primary locations for the delivery of student services at its two major campuses: two Hubs at Callaghan in the western suburbs of Newcastle and one at Ourimbah on the Central Coast of NSW. In addition, a city-based Hub was established at the Graduate School of Business in the Newcastle CBD.

An interesting and unusual aspect of the changes to the delivery of student services at the University was the move – both physical and structural – of the Faculty Assistant Registrars and Program Officers into the Academic Registrar's portfolio. This involved the move by staff who previously occupied offices in close proximity to their Faculties to the Student Hubs.

The Assistant Academic Registrars were given responsibility as the Managers of the Student Hubs. This meant that the Assistant Academic Registrars not only had responsibility for the management and co-ordination of student services in each of their respective Faculties, but also responsibility for the day-to-day management of student enquiry centres with hundreds of enquirers per day from students across the University.

The Student Hubs concept at Newcastle took the one-stop-shop concept further than would normally be expected. Not only could students receive advice and referral about day-to-day issues such as enrolment, fees and timetabling, but also have access to specialist Program Officer staff who dealt with more complex enquiries such as compliance with degree requirements. This, coupled with the opportunity for students to submit assignments at any Student Hub, meant that a large range of student-university interactions were now managed by staff under the one roof.

Method

The ATEM presentation in 2010 reviewed the success of one particular aspect of the Student Hubs, that is, the move to centralise previously Faculty-based student services offered by the Assistant Academic Registrars and the Program Officers who report to them. It assessed the effectiveness of student services - particularly those related to Faculties - under the current arrangements which had existed for over four years. It provided survey results from key stakeholders including students and staff about whether Faculty services can be satisfactorily delivered from a central unit and at a distance from the Faculty. Key stakeholders included students; Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors; Heads of School; Faculty and School Executive Officers; Assistant Academic Registrars; Program Officers and other staff working in the Student Hubs.

This year's presentation will provide further analysis of the success or otherwise of the move to centralise Faculty based services. Some important changes have occurred recently which seem to bring into question the University's appetite for this 'service experiment' and at the time of writing the current model looks under threat. All will be revealed in September!

Summary

The overall findings of the survey conducted in 2010 were that most staff, particularly those from the central Student and Academic Services, believed that services to students had improved since the introduction of the Student Hubs. However, there was some concern about the relationships between SAS and Faculty staff and the remoteness of the Hubs staff to their colleagues in the Faculties.

The concerns have only deepened in the last two years and are in large part responsible for the current questioning of the service model.

Whilst overall the Hubs had been considered have a positive effect on the student experience, the placement of the Assistant Academic Registrars and Program Officers in the Student Hubs and as part of the central service unit may have been a step too far.