

Culture Change to Support a Positive Student Experience

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Natalie Downing has a wealth of experience in the student experience and engagement area at the University of Newcastle, spanning 21 years. Her various positions have included Manager, Residential Life, Accommodation Services, Assistant Academic Registrar in the Faculties of Business and Law, Education and Arts and Science and Information Technology. Natalie has also managed three of the University's key student contact centre hubs.

Natalie was General Manager, Student Life for University of Newcastle Services Ltd, before she recently took up her current position as Associate Director, Faculty Services in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment. In her current role, Natalie is responsible for the strategic management of the Faculty's administrative and support services.

Jayne Nelson has been Associate Director Faculty Services for the Faculty of Science and Information Technology at the University of Newcastle since 2008 and is responsible for providing high level strategic management of the Faculty's administrative and support portfolio across multiple campuses to facilitate delivery of core business activities: teaching and learning, research and research training, international business, and industry and community engagement.

Prior to working in the higher education sector, Jayne was involved in advertising and for a number of years was employed as an Art Director with agencies including Peach Advertising; Advertising Australia and MojoPartners. She has been involved in the creation of a number of successful advertising campaigns for clients including Australia Post, Kraft, Tourism Victoria, Nestle, Sydney Water and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Ruth Pring is a communications professional with more than ten years' experience in the higher education sector. She holds an honours degree in Communications from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). Ruth has previously worked in communications roles at UTS, La Trobe University and most recently at Swinburne University of Technology, where she was Associate Director Marketing Communications (International). In 2009 she won the JWT Education Emerging Leadership Award for her work on transforming Swinburne's international student marketing and communications. In 2011 she moved to the University of Newcastle, where she is currently a Project Officer coordinating student experience and engagement initiatives and student communications for the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment. In this role, Ruth particularly enjoys the challenge of supporting cultural change in the workplace.

Student experience has become a critical marker of the success of an institution. The University of Newcastle has varied results on student experience with some areas measuring considerable success and others in need of improvement. In general, order to improve student experience there are many aspects of service, teaching and environment which need to be evaluated and considered.

The University of Newcastle consistently measures and tracks student experience through surveys and focus groups. Through this evaluation it is clear that to ensure that a positive student focus pervades all aspects of service and delivery, staff attitudes are

of critical importance. In short, we need “buy in” from everyone. Professional staff at every level, all academic staff whether sessional or tenured and at all levels all need to share the goal to make the university experience for students exceptional.

With this in mind, a team of staff in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, funded through strategic project funds by the University Student Experience and Engagement Working Party, began to measure staff attitudes and perceptions about the student experience. The group, with support from the University Planning, Quality and Reporting unit, designed a survey to gauge the views of both academic and professional staff in the Faculty.

This paper will explore the initial 2011 survey findings, outline the actions taken through the Student Engagement and Experience projects and present the results of the 2012 initial staff survey in the Faculty of Science and Information Technology and the 2012 follow-up staff survey in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment. Do staff attitudes and perceptions make a difference to the engagement and positive experience of our students?