

Stream: Sharing Good Practice

Submission title:

Countdown to zero: helping students negotiate entry to university

Presenter:

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This proposed session looks at how an online 'Countdown to Zero' course helped direct entrant students successfully negotiate their entry to the Business School, and how it may have a wider application across the university.

Students making direct entry to years 2, 3 and 4 coming from college often have trouble making the transition from college to university, technologically and emotionally as well as academically. In February 2016, the Business School created a position of Articulation Support Tutor, whose role it is to support students making this transition. This role has been filled by Dr Shuna Marr from the Tourism subject group who, in co-operation with the Confident Futures, Academic Skills and Careers teams, has developed a programme of interventions and events over the past 2 years. These have made a big difference in empowering students to make this transition more successfully. The programme was developed with sound theoretical underpinning, based on a review of academic good practice identified in the literature (e.g.: Bridges, 2009; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Cheng et al, 2015) , and then primary research undertaken throughout each year, of focus groups and surveys, as well as analysis of secondary data gathered from Facebook and Moodle.

This session proposes to look at one intervention in particular: a 4-week, online course called 'Countdown to Zero', which ran for the first time in August 2017. Based on research data gathered during the first iteration of the transition programme, it was noted that a key point of consternation by incoming students was in the 4 weeks leading up to entry into university. It had been noted that a lot of this panic was played out in the dedicated Facebook group. While these concerns had been handled at the time, with so much constant and repetitive activity, it turned some people off the Facebook group because of overwhelm.

Based on data gathered, it was identified that there was a definite pattern to their questions and concerns during that four-week period, and these could be better addressed in more depth in an online course. Therefore, a 4-week, online, MOOC-style course was developed, addressing each of the concerns on a weekly basis. Week zero minus 4 was about joining the community and orientation, Week Zero minus 3 looked at matriculation. The following week covered module choice and the final week looked at timetables. Videos, information and quizzes were created that guided students through the various processes.

In the early weeks of trimester 1 in autumn 2017, a survey was conducted and the findings confirmed that this course had made a significant difference in allaying the fears of the incoming students. This has led me to consider that it would be worthwhile sharing this practice with colleagues, as this kind of course has potential to have a wider application in other Schools and not just for direct entrants, but for many cohorts of students. Some of the challenges in doing this on a wider scale have also been identified, and solutions will be offered as to how these may be overcome.

References:

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Cheng, M., Pringle Barnes, G., Edwards, C., Valyrakis, M. and Corduneau, C. (2015). *Transition Skills and Strategy: Key Transition Skills at the Different Transition Points*. [PDF] Glasgow: QAA Scotland, pp.1-6