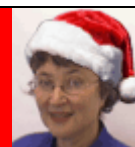


## Christmas message from the PVC (Education)



Christmas is here, and the end of a busy and successful year as we adjust to the changing tertiary environment. As we move to become a high access university, providing opportunities for a professional education to a much broader spectrum of students, we need to implement strategies which can enable the University to maintain high standards while accepting students who are less well prepared for University. To this end, a number of new student learning support projects were introduced in 2008 and more are planned for implementation in 2009.

The University also established four entry pathways for domestic students: under Pathway 1 (UAI = 65+) students have direct access to the University; Pathway 2 students (UAI 60-64.99) will be required to participate in the Smart Study Passport program and will also have access to extra in-discipline support; Pathway 3 students will enter UC through the University of Canberra College; and Pathway 4 is designed for Indigenous students and offers a customised foundation program.

With best wishes to all staff for a Happy Christmas and a great year for student learning in 2009!

Carole Kayrooz  
PVC Education

### *Library Rovers pilot - a peer-support success!*

Students using the Library during semester-time can now access just-in-time peer support from the Library Rovers. Rovers move around the Library and can be signalled or phoned by students for help with using computer software, printing, navigating web sites, using the online learning system (Moodle) and the student portal (OSIS), finding online journal articles and finding materials in the Library's collections.

Recruited from the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering, the Rovers, were given training and support from Library and ICTS staff. The pilot, funded as one of the learning support initiatives recommended by the University's recent Course and Disciplines Review, was a resounding success. During the 13 weeks of the pilot, an average of 173 students per week were assisted and of the 225 students providing feedback, all but one were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service. Library Rovers were not intended to provide peer mentoring but were trained to identify when students needed referral to more expert learning support services elsewhere in the Library or on campus.

The Library Rovers service will continue in 2009 as one of the features of the high-access, high-support student experience at UC.

### *Supporting students on probation*

Students who are placed on probation are at high risk of dropping out of University, which is why the Academic Skills Program (ASP) trialled a 'Retention Project' to follow-up with students who have been placed on probation for failing more than 50% of their study load. The students were contacted by letter and SMS and invited to make an appointment with an ASP adviser.

In first semester 2008, 88 of the 350 students on probation came and discussed their study with an adviser. The overwhelming problem for most students was work-study balance but there were also issues such as understanding academic requirements, course structure, and communicating with lecturers. Many students made repeat visits to the ASP; others were put in contact with relevant campus services.

The outcome of the project was very gratifying. Students who attended a consultation with the ASP under this project had a 15% higher retention rate than those who did not attend. International students, in particular, had a 20% better retention rate. Feedback was glowing; as one student put it:

*I thought I was wasting my time. I thought my English was not good enough...[but] Now I am confident I am going to pass the course. Now I am even thinking of doing a Masters degree.*

#### Article contributions

This newsletter is published monthly by Learning and Teaching. Contributions from L&T staff should be forwarded to the editor at: [blt@canberra.edu.au](mailto:blt@canberra.edu.au)

#### Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this newsletter and its contents. These will be made available to all staff in future editions. Feedback should be forwarded to the editor at: [blt@canberra.edu.au](mailto:blt@canberra.edu.au)



## Getting a smart start

Getting off to a good start is a key factor in student success and retention. In first semester 2009, the University will be piloting the new Smart Study Passport: an interactive academic skills orientation program.

The Smart Study Passport will be compulsory for international students and for domestic students with low UAI scores (60-64.99). All new students will also be encouraged to participate in the five face-to-face and three online modules. The program aims to be as interactive as possible: students will meet new friends and have a lot of fun while they learn to navigate the university culture and pick up some key tips for successful study.

The Smart Study Passport booklets, imaginatively designed by Michael Latter in the Marketing team, will be available in the Library, Student Centre, ASP and Learning Resource Centres. Most sessions will take place in O-week but late starters can catch up on the modules in Weeks 1-3.

For more information, see <http://www.canberra.edu.au/lasnet/smart-study-passport>

## Supporting up – not dumbing down

Accepting students with lower UAIs means that we need to ensure that students are scaffolded in their transition to university. Bridging the gap between school and university may be even harder for this new cohort of students.

To help students make this adjustment and develop the academic skills they will be needing, a program of extra in-discipline support has been prepared in key first year units. The pattern of this support varies according to disciplinary needs. For example, in *Introduction to Marketing* Petra Bouvain will use the weeks in which no tutorials traditionally take place to introduce sessions on critical reading, report-writing and library search strategies germane to her subject area. The Faculty of Science, on the other hand, will be providing a Bridging Program before O-week for students who have not studied Biology at high school.

The in-discipline support program aims to augment and complement the existing academic development programs already in place in many first year units.

For more information contact: Kate Wilson, Academic Skills Program, x 2124: [kate.wilson@canberra.edu.au](mailto:kate.wilson@canberra.edu.au)

## PALS program

The PALS (peer-assisted learning sessions) program was implemented in four units this semester: *Accounting for Managers*, *Introduction to Business Law*, *Analysing Disease Part 1* and *Reconstructing Maths Understanding*. PALS sessions are interactive adjunct workshops run by students who have previously succeeded in the unit. Over half of the enrolled students in the units attended at least one session, which is in excess of the national average of 40%, with 21 % attending five or more times. Students who attended five times or more achieved HDs, DIs and CRs at higher rates than their peers. 'At risk' students, those with pass level GPAs, commencing students and international students, benefitted significantly from frequent attendance at PALS. Student responses from an end-of-semester questionnaire were very positive; over 85% would recommend PALS to other students and attend PALS in other units.

For more information, contact Judy Couchman, Academic Skills Program, x 2361: [judy.couchman@canberra.edu.au](mailto:judy.couchman@canberra.edu.au)

## Some useful weblinks on enhancing student success

The 2008 Enhancing Student Success Conference - 'Working Collaboratively with Students in a Diverse University Environment' <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/conference/enhancing-student-success/>

The Academic Skills Program annual reports <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills>

*Attracting, engaging and retaining: new conversations about learning* (2008) Australian Council for Educational Research [http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AUSSE\\_ASER-Report.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AUSSE_ASER-Report.pdf)