2017

Establishing factors that enable or inhibit student access to academic support office services

Louise Johnston
The University of Notre Dame Australia

Establishing Factors that Enable or Inhibit Student Access to Academic Support Office Services

A thesis submitted to

The University of Notre Dame Australia

in fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

By

LOUISE JOHNSTON

2017

School of Education

Principal Supervisor: Professor Marguerite Maher

Statement of Original Authorship

I, Louise Johnston, declare that the work contained in this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Education by Research, in the School of Education, University of Notre Dame Australia is wholly my own work. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed

Louise Johnston

Dedication

To my beloved mother, Judith Mary,

who understood the importance of getting a job done and moving forward by encouraging me

every step of the way to complete this degree. Thanks Mum. x

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the unwavering support of Marguerite Maher. I thank you wholeheartedly Professor Marguerite Maher for your thoughtful insight, high expectations, honest feedback and constant availability. I am deeply appreciative of the valuable professional and personal experience as a result of your inspirational mentoring.

To my friends and colleagues at the University of Notre Dame, thank you for your kind words of support and encouragement.

To Morgann Quilty, thank you for your support and referencing expertise.

To the research participants, my gratitude for your interest and willingness to participate in this study and giving up valuable time to share your thoughts and perspectives.

And lastly, to my children – Jack, Will, Maddi, and Tessa, thank you for accepting the time constraints of a working and studying mother for so long, which meant less cooking, crushed school uniforms and weekends at home. The endless study has finally come to a close and we need to have some fun!

ABSTRACT

With the increasing diversity of students entering higher education there is a greater need and obligation to assist in creating an even playing field to ensure the academic success of all students. Learning support has received much attention in the last decade with the introduction of a more diverse population. Consequently, now more than ever, universities must ensure best practices are implemented for enhancing academic skills of students. This qualitative case study, undertaken at one university in Sydney, examined the factors that enabled or inhibited students from accessing Academic Support Office services. A survey and interviews were used to collect data to address the research questions. Transition Pedagogy theoretical framework was used in the design of the study and for data analysis. Key enablers were the Objects of the University, commitment of staff and current transition support strategies. Inhibitors were perceived stigma, ineffective dissemination practices and time constraints.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Government policy changes in Australia have extended higher education to a greater number of students. This has left increasing numbers of students feeling vulnerable as they strive to meet academic expectations and the rigour required to succeed in tertiary studies. This vulnerability of students has created an ethical conundrum for higher education institutions. They have opened opportunities to students who would not previously have enrolled in higher education and these students have, potentially, more diverse and complex learning needs than universities had previously encountered. It has become apparent that by enrolling such students, without necessarily having the appropriate support frameworks in place, their retention and completion has been compromised. It has been essential for universities to seek best practice for support initiatives so that enrolled students can persist and achieve success (McNaught & Beal, 2012; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2012a; Murray, 2011). In such a competitive higher education market, catering to student needs has become paramount to the business of education and the retention of students. These events in the tertiary sector have resulted in an explosion of research in transition strategies over the last ten years and have seen the birth and development of Sally Kift's (2009) theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy. This framework comprises research detailing four generations of transition practice.

This current study has reinforced the importance of context at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) and the qualities that make the institution unique. Transition to university for students and higher education institutions has become more complex (Kift,

2015). Consequently, UNDA is no different to any other institution in the desire to identify and develop support strategies that will assist students to succeed academically and thrive in their tertiary journey.

1.2 Rationale for this Study

The main research question addresses the need to identify factors that enable or inhibit student access to the Academic Support Office (ASO) services. The extensive transition research that has taken place in the last decade is testament to the tertiary sector's commitment to supporting its students and determination to provide opportunities for academic success. Regulatory Government agencies, such as Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) have also contributed to the conscientious support practices of higher education institutions during this time.

With the changing profile of students, the tertiary sector in Australia is implementing and researching the value of a variety of initiatives to broaden student support. It was timely, therefore, UNDA evaluate current strategies in light of sector changes and investigate student perceptions of the effectiveness of current practices and to garner their recommendations for improvement.

1.3 What Brought Me to the Study

It is clear from my perspective that student cohorts have changed over the six years I have been in an academic support position at UNDA. The number of students accessing individual support has increased, as well as the complexities of students' academic concerns. Students are entering university via a variety of pathways and each entry point enrols students with varied abilities. The disparity between student educational experiences has widened, so

few students appear to share common practices or capabilities. If universities continue to alter entry criteria to increase their share of the educational market then universities are more accountable than ever to safeguard the wellbeing and promote the success of their students.

As coordinator of ASO services, I have experience of students expressing a lack of awareness about the service; others voiced frustration that they had not accessed ASO services sooner and, consequently, experienced less success in their studies. I am also cognisant of the fact that students who need academic support do not always engage with ASO services. On occasion, students are strongly advised to access ASO services but not all comply. Despite some students' awareness of their academic deficiencies, it is apparent that they do not access ASO services. The other concern is for students who have no awareness of their academic deficiencies, and the reality that they will never access ASO services if they believe they do not need the support.

UNDA has the opportunity to align services more closely with all student needs, however to achieve this, it was necessary to ascertain student perceptions of current practice. An opportunity to research some of these phenomena was exciting since the results would have a significant influence in a unit within the University that would directly impact support practices and decisions. Information derived from this research will inform initiatives or adaptations to current ASO practice.

1.4 Research Questions

The first research question was: What factors enable or inhibit student access to ASO services?

The second was: How can UNDA better assist students transitioning into first year?

The third was: What suggestions do students provide that will enhance access (earlier access) to ASO services?

1.5 Overview of the Literature

Changing Government regulations in the tertiary sector in the last ten years, have created substantial changes in higher education institutions. One of the key changes, driven by the Bradley Review (2008), has been the increase and diversity of the student populations enrolling in university institutions (Adam, Skalicky, & Brown, 2011). The widening of participation has created a number of complex considerations for the tertiary sector to ensure all students are given the opportunity to academically succeed (Kift, 2015; Murray, 2011).

It is not just Australia experiencing a widening of participation in higher education; all over the world tertiary institutions are feeling the pressure to compete with the demands of a rapidly developing global economy with efforts to "increase the number of people with degree-level qualifications and also improve the quality of the graduates" (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. xi). Student transition is defined as the "process students experience to become ready to engage in learning as they move into new educational contexts" (Wahr, Gray, & Radloff, 2009, p.434). University support for student transition includes a range of initiatives designed to assist learning readiness (Wahr et al., 2009). The support provided by higher education institutions has become a vital element of successful transition, particularly with changing student populations (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012; Wojcieszek, Theaker, Ratcliff, MacPherson, & Boyd, 2014; Brown, Adam, Douglas, & Skalicky, 2009).

Kift (2009, p.1) recognised that, "in all their diversity, students come to higher education to learn and that it is within the first year curriculum that students must be inspired,

supported, and realise their sense of belonging; not only for early engagement and retention, but also as foundational for later year learning success and a lifetime of professional practice".

The birth of "Transition Pedagogy" as a theoretical framework is associated with four phases or generations. The first generation of research in the early 2000s focused on isolated co-curricular activities of support within universities such as orientation and peer mentoring activities (Nelson & Clarke, 2014).The second generation of research remained outside of the curriculum with the majority of strategies focused on pilot or early stage initiative support programs (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). Literature started to emerge a decade ago to reflect a learning centred philosophy led by Nelson and Kift's (2005) First Year Curriculum Principles. This is the third generation and the term Transition Pedagogy was introduced and began to gain momentum due to the recognition of the delivery of a research-based framework of support. The focus of Transition Pedagogy remained on curriculum design for the diverse cohorts of first year students entering higher education (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). The fourth generation according to Nelson, Clarke, Kift, and Creagh (2011) reviews the implementation of evidenced-based practice of previous generations including Transition Pedagogy. Penn-Edward and Donnison (2014) are proposing the fourth generation is more about the wider community investing in the students' academic experience. The fourth generation of research is a work in progress and continues to unfold.

As the current study focused on commencing students and appropriate support for them in their transition to higher education, the theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy was chosen to frame the design of the study and provide a lens through which to analyse the data.

On reviewing the last two decades of literature, the extensive body of conceptual and empirical evidence related to the First Year Experience (FYE), continues to evolve and refine over time as support strategies and initiatives are developed, assessed, monitored and evaluated. There were notably six main transition structures of support that were consistently highlighted in the literature: early identification; appointment of a FYE Director/Coordinator; social interaction strategies; transition or preparatory courses; individual support; and diagnostic support. What has been shown across all initiatives is the importance and success of early identification of students in need of support if they are to persevere and be successful in their studies (Nelson et al., 2012a; Jackson & Read, 2012).

Targeting students at risk of performing poorly through a Contact Management System (CMS) by identifying certain behaviours such as failure to submit an assignment or failure in their first assignment (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009) increases the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Contacting students is the foundation of the success of early identification programs because these programs are proactive rather than reactive. Institutions that initiate individual contact with students rather than passively waiting for students to refer themselves have higher retention rates (Jackson & Read, 2012). Some examples of institutions using this practice include; the University of Technology (QUT), Griffith University, Edith Cowan University, University of Adelaide, Western Sydney University and University of Sydney.

The second initiative in the tertiary sector that experienced success as an effective structure of support is the appointment of specific staff or a FYE Director/Coordinator for transition initiatives. The duties of this position involve the coordination of the various areas

of the university into an integrated unit of support for commencing students (Kift, 2008; Burnett & Larmar, 2011). A further task for the FYE Director is to build consensus-based FYE policy enhancements. Some examples of institutions using this structure of support include; Murdoch University, Deakin University, QUT and Western Sydney University.

The third initiative utilised in many institutions is the implementation of peer mentoring programs to encourage the social interaction of students (Morosanu, Handley, & O'Donovan, 2010; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2008). Highlighted frequently in the FYE literature is the concern for the retention and attrition of students and the ability to adapt to the socio-cultural environment of their institution (Morosanu et al., 2010; Rodrigo et al.,, 2014; Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015). Examples of institutions using effective peer mentoring include the University of Sydney, Edith Cowan University and Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom. Social interaction has also been encouraged across numerous universities by utilising the social media platform of Facebook and the like to encourage commencing students to communicate (Jenkins, Lyons, Bridgstock, & Carr, 2012).

The fourth initiative is transition and/or preparatory courses designed to address transitions needs, particularly in regard to preparation for tertiary studies. These have been effective for the majority of incoming students, not just those at-risk or in marginalised groups (Adam, Hartigan, & Brown, 2010). Examples of institutions utilising this structure of support include Murdoch University and Western Sydney University.

The fifth structure of support that offers more traditional assistance are individual appointments where students self-refer for assistance with an academic advisor/officer. This type of support offers the opportunity for each student's specific needs to be catered for, therefore, addressing a range of individual differences (Brown et al., 2009).

The final structure of support identified in the literature is diagnostic support. This type of support assesses commencing students' literacy levels and recommends assistance for those students who did not perform adequately on the assessment.

The future challenge for higher education is to identify how to best transform the extensive research and theory uncovered in the last few decades into effective institutional action. There has never been a greater time to implement initiatives for commencing diverse cohorts.

1.6 Methodology

This study is an interpretative case study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) providing descriptive accounts of factors that contributed to student decisions to access or not access ASO services. The research in this study is descriptive because it is designed to gain student perspectives; a secondary aim is to enhance the efficacy of ASO services.

1.6.1 Methods

This study used a collected data through surveys and group or individual interviews. The survey questions were piloted three times to refine questions and respond to feedback from staff and students. The survey provided information on a broad selection of topics (Tingley, 2014). The data from the survey enabled the development and refinement of further questions for the interview to elicit deeper knowledge of student perspectives. The survey was directly administered via Survey Monkey in class. The survey enabled data to be collected from a large sample size of participants reasonably quickly and inexpensively.

Data collected through surveys were analysed using descriptive and inductive (inferential) statistics (Cohen et al., 2011). The surveys also included some open-ended

questions which were analysed thematically. The survey data provided focused themes to include in the interviews such as student preparation for tertiary studies, awareness of ASO services, effective marketing of ASO services, suggestion of strategies to support students in transition, and student reflection on challenging issues they experienced in their first year. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and were analysed thematically with the unit of analysis being the sentence (Girvan, 2015).

1.6.2 Sample Selection

There are seven Schools of study at UNDA, Sydney, however, two schools were excluded based on dissimilar characteristics to other Schools i.e. the School of Medicine and the School of Philosophy. The five Schools in the study included; Arts and Science, Business, Education, Law, and Nursing. These Schools provided a cross-discipline variety to capture rich data. The total number of students who volunteered as participants and completed the survey was 366.

1.7 Key Findings

The context of UNDA is unique compared to other higher education institutions because it is driven philosophically by the Objects of the University. The Objects of the University are:

a. the provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values; and

b. the provision of an excellent standard of -

   i.   teaching, scholarship and research;

   ii. training for the professions; and

iii.   pastoral care for its students.

The findings of this research have reinforced the importance of this philosophy as a major contributor to the distinctive context of UNDA and the type of support that continues to be effective in this University and the type of support that would further meet student needs. Additionally, drivers for other universities to adapt ASO services are increased numbers of International students who are likely to need support with their English learning as well as their studies, and increased numbers of students studying online. These drivers are not applicable to the UNDA where there are very few International enrolments and online study is limited. The preferred option is face-to-face delivery of courses.

The factors identified as enablers for students accessing ASO services were the Objects of the University, commitment of staff, the type of ASO services and current support strategies in place at UNDA. The three main factors identified as inhibitors for student access to ASO services were: perceived stigma associated with accessing ASO services; dissemination of information on ASO services; and time constraints. A further key finding is that the current support structure of ASO services do not necessarily reach all students who may be struggling with their studies. Participants suggested that the implementation of a CMS may address this by utilising proactive measures to target struggling students. Additionally, suggestions from the majority of respondents in this study was strengthening peer mentoring as a key transition strategy to assist in socialising and extending student support at UNDA.

1.8 Limitations

This study is subjective, as it took place in the theory of interpretivism. Since the study was undertaken in the context of one university, it was limited by the social and cultural setting of that university. Findings are therefore not necessarily generalisable across all universities in NSW or Australia. Case study researchers are constantly making judgments about the significance of the data and consequently the insights and expertise of the researcher is an essential quality in determining the significance and quality of the data. The researcher in this current study had expertise in supporting students in transition and experience in collaborating with students, so consequently was well placed to interpret the data.

It was imperative during data collection that participants be willing to share their experiences, ideas and feelings in order to successfully make deductions and recommendations. Therefore, as researcher, I relied on the authentic contributions of respondents and participants in the interviews. It is likely that the survey data are truly representative of student perceptions as it was completed anonymously. In the interviews, however, it is possible that participants would be inhibited by the presence of other students, or may have been inclined to say what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. My experience in working with students and the fact that there was no lecturer-student power dynamic, may have ameliorated this to an extent, but it remains a limitation of this study.

A further limitation in this study is that perhaps only one specific type of student volunteered for the interviews. However, the survey data provided a broad overview that guided questioning and a deeper understanding of research interest was accessed as a result. My experience in conducting group and individual interviews may have mitigated this to an extent, but this, too, remains a limitation of the study.

1.9 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter one provided an overview of the current study. The literature review is presented in chapter two. The methodology is found in chapter three. The findings are presented in chapter four, and chapter five includes the discussion, conclusion, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Universities worldwide are catering for an increasingly diverse student population while pursuing outstanding academic standards (Couzens et al., 2015). The focus on quality learning for students has been highlighted in Australia in recent years as a result of substantial changes in Government regulations. Policy changes have widened participation in access to higher education for a greater number of students and this has created a number of considerations for the tertiary sector to ensure all students are given the opportunity to academically succeed (Murray, 2011). Transition to university for students and higher education institutions has become more complex since diversity has broadened the academic ability of students entering tertiary education (Kift, 2015). To experience the benefits of tertiary education as a global community, simply enrolling greater numbers into higher education is not enough, initiatives need to be implemented to enable students to engage in ways that will assist in degree completion and beyond in their profession (Nelson et al., 2012a). In addition, Murray (2011) reinforces the ethical and moral responsibility of universities to support and assist students they have enrolled to persist and achieve success while at the same time providing academic excellence (McNaught & Beal, 2012). This literature review is therefore structured under the following three themes:

1. Government regulations creating the diversity in the student population;
2. as a result, transitioning to higher education for some students may be more difficult and accordingly, the birth of the theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy was developed; and

3. consequently, a variety of support initiatives (internationally, nationally and locally) have been implemented to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed academically

2.1.1 Government Regulations Increasing Diversity in Student Populations

In Australia, in the 1960s, less than 5% of school leavers advanced to tertiary education and mature age entry was uncommon (McNaught & Beal, 2012). Students advancing to tertiary studies in the 60s were considered elite as compared to students entering university today where government changes have enabled larger masses of people, including international students, to participate in higher education (McNaught & Beal, 2012). The increasing inclusion of international students has had a marked impact on higher education in several dimensions, including government regulations, quality of curriculum and support initiatives.

"Surveys and interviews with university academics continue to find that academics believe students lack the English language skills to communicate at an appropriate level for tertiary study" (Dunworth, 2010, p.5). TEQSA defines English language proficiency "as the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning appropriately in spoken and written contexts while completing their higher education studies and after they graduate" (TEQSA, 2013, p.7). Much of the attention on English language proficiencies has been directed toward international students due to the publication of the high profile report by Birrell (2006) on the concerning level of English language proficiencies of overseas students graduating from Australian universities. According to Dunworth (2010), however, the concerning level of English language proficiency not only applies to students

who have English as an additional language in Australian higher education institutions but also more generally to all tertiary students.

The English language proficiency of students has attracted increasing attention in recent years and has been the target of a number of Australian Government and higher education initiatives, the first being a National Symposium in 2007 (International Education Association of Australia [IEAA], 2013). The catalyst for the symposium was the publication of Birrell's (2006) report and the Australian Government responded with a National Symposium on English Language Competence of International Students in 2007 attended by representatives from many Australian universities, convened by the IEAA (Dunworth, 2010). The 2007 symposium is recognised as an innovative event due to findings that highlighted the issues of quality assurance in the tertiary sector and precipitated action among researchers, education institutions, quality assurance agencies and governments (IEAA, 2013). In particular, action was initiated in 2008-09 by the Australian Government and the Australian Universities Quality Agency to commission the development of 'Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities' as a result of recommendations from the symposium (IEAA, 2013).

The next major Australian Government initiative was the The 'Bradley Review of Higher Education' in 2008. Recommendations from the review (Bradley et al., 2008) led to significant changes in government policy. The Bradley Review (2008) was the driving force behind the changing student population enrolling in university institutions (Adam et al., 2011). The purpose of the review was to address "whether higher education is structured, organised and financed to position Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xi). Subsequently, to meet the demands of a rapidly moving global

economy it was necessary not only to "increase the number of people with degree-level qualifications but also improve the quality of the graduates" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xi). This review highlighted that university degrees were mostly accessible to high socio-economic status (SES) students who according to Bradley et al. (2008) were often students who achieved best on final school year examinations. In pursuit of equity, the Government approved two key recommendations from the Bradley Review (2008); firstly a national target of at least 40 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds attaining a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025 (Bradley recommended achieving the target by 2020) and secondly, by 2020, twenty per cent of undergraduate level enrolments would be available to people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (Bradley et al., 2008).

The Australian Government recognised these reforms through increased funding to student places, student income support, scholarships, institutional performance targets, and a new quality and regulatory agency (Bradley et al., 2008). The increased funding of student places led to the uncapping of University undergraduate placements in 2012 and the subsequent increase in access to higher education for lower SES students (Bradley et al., 2008). The introduction of uncapping university undergraduate placements widened participation by changing enrolments in higher education to a student demand-driven system. Universities would decide their own entry standards and enrolment targets for eligible students, consequently, increasing participation because students had greater motivation to enrol because of the increased opportunity of gaining their first-preference course (Bradley et al., 2008).

As a result of these Government regulatory changes, the type of student enrolling in tertiary education shifted from the elite scholar to a more diverse scholar (Nelson et al.,

2012a). The Government wanted to ensure the tertiary sector was catering to the needs of the diverse scholar so in the 2010-11 budget, the Australian Government established TEQSA as the new national body for higher education regulation and quality assurance to ensure that higher education providers meet minimum standards, promote best practice and improve the quality of the higher education sector (Bradley et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 2012a).

The emerging responsibilities of TEQSA (2013), such as the development of threshold standards, English language standards for all students, and the development of streamlined visa processing requirements for universities aligned with the aims of the follow- up symposium in 2013, "Five Years On: English Language Competence of International Students (IEAA, 2013). The success of the 2007 Symposium and the subsequent changes in policy and practice led to a shift ensuring greater emphasis on the English language competence of international students (IEAA, 2013). "The shift has been from predominantly front-end considerations (preparation, selection, and entry) to an increased focus on issues related to in-course English language development and support and an increased focus on the desirable level of proficiency at the point of exit from tertiary study" (IEAA, 2013, p.8). International students have been the primary focus, often as a result of media attention, however, given the "diversity of the Australian student community and Australian Government policy to increase the participation of lower SES students it is crucial to understand and act on the understanding that English language proficiency is relevant for all students" (IEAA, 2013, p.8). The introduction of TEQSA has called higher education institutions to action to ensure quality education for all students. The responsibility also rests with the national agencies, including the government, to ensure a measure of quality is shared across all tertiary sectors (IEAA, 2013).

National agencies and government bodies have continued to impact on tertiary institution enrolment practices, some already mentioned. These practices have altered the demographic profile of students over time. Reviews related to education services for overseas students (ESOS) and vocational education training (VET) have been a catalyst for change. Following are key examples of such reviews:

> The Bradley Review of Higher Education, the Baird and Knight Reviews of ESOS and of Student Visas respectively, the Base Funding Review, a series of VET related reviews, a Senate Enquiry into the Welfare of International Students, a Review of Visa Assessment Levels, the Asian Century White Paper and the International Education Advisory Council's report and Australia – Educating Globally (IEAA, 2013, p.8).

These reviews allocate the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of students to tertiary institutions. No longer would the premise hold that tertiary institutions provided set curricula and students would meet those standards or fail. The emphasis shifted to providing support strategies and initiatives so diverse students, both domestic and international, have the same opportunities to access the curriculum.

Other factors affecting the tertiary landscape, include the advancement of technology which extends accessibility for students and consequently affects how learning and engagement are achieved in higher education institutions (IEAA, 2013). Such technologies impact how the academic curriculum is delivered and as a result agencies such as TEQSA and Australian Skills Quality Authority have become increasingly important in enforcing threshold standards across the tertiary sector in such a changing tertiary landscape.

2.2 Transition in Higher Education

Student transition is defined as the "process students experience to become ready to engage in learning as they move into new educational contexts" (Wahr et al., 2009, p.434), such as school-leaver to first-year university student or vocational course to higher education degree. University support for student transition include a range of initiatives designed to assist learning readiness (Wahr et al., 2009). The support provided by higher education institutions becomes a vital element of successful transition, particularly with the increasing diversity of student populations (Briggs et al., 2012; Wojcieszek et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2009). Widening of participation of students is not unique to higher education in Australia. A large body of research has been accumulating globally since the 1990s, in regard to improving student engagement in tertiary institutions (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Student engagement, according to Zepke and Leach (2010), is a key indicator of student success. With the government drive to increase national economic achievement by increasing participation and attaining high numbers of course completion, the challenge to engage students becomes more essential.

Students in first year tertiary education often feel under prepared academically and emotionally and these feelings can affect their adjustment into university life (Gill, Ramjan, Kock, Dlugon, Andrew, & Salamonson, 2011). The diverse nature of the student population has become increasingly problematic as new students commence their studies with varied academic and social skills as well as different backgrounds and cultures (Kift, 2014). There has been a vast body of research devoted to the FYE in higher education, with particular focus on the transition experience of the undergraduate (Nelson, Smith, & Clarke, 2012b). This literature has noted the obstacles students may face as a result of this transition. Kift (2014)

suggests that if students struggle or become disengaged in their first year, they are more likely to perform poorly academically or leave university. The transition to university marks a milestone for many students and coincides with life adjustments such as moving out of home, being responsible for their attendance, becoming a self-regulated learner and balancing work and study (Kift, 2014). According to Goldingay et al., (2014) a further difficulty in relation to transition is the stigma students perceive they may face if they experience difficulties adjusting to tertiary studies. Furthermore, they are sensitive to the idea that the academic difficulties faced might require remedial support or assistance (Goldingay et al., 2014).

In addition, the importance of student perceptions during the FYE, particularly in first semester can impact on their decision to continue or leave university (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014). Understanding student experiences, expectations and outcomes may provide essential information to developing successful transition programs (Bowles et al., 2014). According to Kift (2014) further obstacles to disengagement include students maintaining paid work during their study and the efforts to complete more flexible online learning in institutions can further inhibit the opportunity for student engagement. A 2010 study shows that students working up to 10 hours of paid work per week are not impacted academically, however, students working for longer hours in paid work have been consistently associated with lower levels of retention (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010).

In 2006, Sally Kift who was employed by QUT at the time, was awarded one of three inaugural Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Senior Fellowships to investigate good practice in first year curriculum design and the articulation of a Transition Pedagogy to support first year learning and engagement (Kift, 2009). In this project, Kift led a national and international collaborative team of 26 academic and professional colleagues

where "more than 150 individual disseminations where made to over 6000 academic and professional staff, in 21 Australian universities and six international universities at 22 national and three international conferences" (Kift, 2009, p.29).

The state of Queensland contributes largely to the research on the FYE due to researchers such as Sally Kift, Karen Nelson, Tracey Creagh, and John Clarke who initiated much of the enquiry and drove early transition initiatives while employed at QUT. For many years QUT have viewed a first year curriculum that engages and supports commencing students as the centrepiece of the FYE (Kift, 2008). To achieve this aim, QUT recognised the need for institution-wide initiatives rather than the fragmented initiatives developed and sustained by individuals or small groups of staff that support students in transition (Kift, 2008). With this in mind, initiatives developed by QUT have led the way in enhancing the FYE by putting research-led practice based theory into action.

It is well recognised that higher education institutions in Australia "must actively support commencing students to ensure equity in access to the opportunities afforded by higher education" (Nelson et al., 2012a, p.83). This is particularly essential for students in underrepresented groups in higher education who may require addition transitional support. According to Hoyne and McNaught (2013) student engagement with academic support is positively associated with successful retention, however, the students that struggle the most are the least likely to engage (Kennelly, Maldoni, & Davies, 2010). Student engagement has been defined as immersion in "activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning" (Coates, 2008, p.vi). A smooth transition into first year in tertiary education is regarded as essential for "student engagement, success and retention" (Nelson & Clarke, 2014, p.23). To determine student engagement behaviour an 'Australasian Survey of Student

Engagement' including the participation of up to 45 Australian higher institutions participating, was introduced in 2008 (Coates, 2008). Student engagement concentrates on the interactions students have with their institution and research has shown that the quality of this interaction can contribute to high quality student outcomes (Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2012). Subsequently, the research is clear on disengaged students and "there is perhaps no greater challenge facing the sector than that of identifying and monitoring the students who are 'at risk' of attrition or poor academic progress" (James et al., 2010, p.102).

Kift's Fellowship served as an opportunity to translate the large body of research, practice and policy into active practice in higher education institutions (Kift, 2009). The initiator for the Fellowship was to recognise that, "in all their diversity, students come to higher education to learn and that it is within the first year curriculum that students must be inspired, supported, and realise their sense of belonging; not only for early engagement and retention, but also as foundational for later year learning success and a lifetime of professional practice" (Kift, 2009, p.1).

What was noted in the FYE literature, at this time, was the domination of support for students around the curriculum involving mainly peripheral and piecemeal activities and strategies (Kift, 2009). What appeared to be missing in the literature was the implementation of curriculum focus in the physical and virtual classroom, that appeared to offer a better form of support and engagement to the FYE and a more reliable contribution to successful transition. Kift's (2009) theoretical framework of transition and research-based Transition Pedagogy is explained more thoroughly in the next section as a "guiding philosophy for

intentional first year curriculum design and support that scaffolds and mediates the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts" (p.2).

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework of "Transition Pedagogy" (four phases)

The FYE literature has a long history, over twenty years, and includes a growing number of initiatives taking place in Australian universities from evidenced-based research. The importance of the first year is emphasised: "within the first year curriculum students must be inspired, supported and realise their sense of belonging; not only for early engagement and retention, but also as foundational for later year learning success and a lifetime of professional practice" (Kift, 2009, p.1).

It is ten years since the term Transition Pedagogy entered the tertiary dialect and according to Kift (2015), vast gains have been experienced in how we theorise and impact our students' first year at university. The emphasis on Transition Pedagogy has been so great in recent years that a Transition Pedagogy handbook has been developed as a practical guide for tertiary staff working with first year students (Nelson et al., 2014). On reviewing the last two decades of literature, the extensive body of conceptual and empirical evidence related to the FYE, continues to evolve and refine over time as support strategies and initiatives are developed, measured, monitored and evaluated. Nelson and Clarke (2014) conducted an extensive analysis of 400 empirical reports and discussions over this time and have framed the literature into four generations of practice (or research).The research continues to review the success of the previous generations and the strategies that were most effective for first year students. Future directions are also discussed and how best to utilise the information discovered in the story of Transition Pedagogy.

2.2.1.1 First Generation

The first generation of research in the early 2000s focused on isolated activities of co-curricular support within universities (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). Activities were primarily exploratory and focused on particular student groups, orientation activities and peer mentoring which gained attention during this period, reflecting the general findings in research that social connections secured successful academic transition to university (Nelson & Clarke, 2014).

2.2.1.2 Second Generation

The second generation of research remained generally at sub-institutional level with the majority of strategies focused on pilot or early stage initiative support programs (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). Literature started to emerge to reflect a learning centred philosophy led by Nelson and Kift's (2005) First Year Curriculum Principles. This is the period that the term Transition Pedagogy was introduced and began to gain attention, although implementation was not obvious until third generation. Orientation and peer programs remained dominant in this period, although rather than one-off experiences a more ongoing effort was adopted, integrating activities into the curriculum where possible (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). Studies of student expectations at university gained greater acknowledgement during this period and the needs and challenges of specific commencing cohorts and the characteristics they exhibited also gained attention in response to the wider diversity of students accessing of higher education (Nelson & Clarke, 2014).

2.2.1.3 Third Generation

The third generation of research in the FYE in the late 2000s focused on - "Articulation of a research-based Transition Pedagogy developed as a guiding philosophy for

intentional first year curriculum design and support that scaffolds and facilitates the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts" (Nelson & Clarke, 2014, p28). Transition Pedagogy is framed around six first year curriculum principles that are identified as being supportive of first year learning engagement, success, and retention. The principles are interconnected and include: transition, diversity, design, engagement, assessment and evaluation, and monitoring (Nelson & Clarke, 2014).

The extensive research on the FYE has received much attention and perhaps Kift, Nelson, and Clarke (2010) and Penn-Edwards and Donnison (2014) summarise two decades of Transition Pedagogy findings best when they describe the success of the first year experience and transition as "everybody's business". The implementation of an institution-wide approach to an intentionally designed curriculum with coordinated policies and practice rather than fragmented initiatives appears to be one method considered to create momentum in Transition Pedagogy (Kift et al., 2010). The institution-wide approach to academic support would also assist in combating the difficulties some students experience due to their diverse background as a result of educational, cultural or financial disadvantage (Nelson, Clarke, Kift, & Creagh, 2011).

The move to embed initiatives based in the third generation of the Transition Pedagogy framework, provides support in and outside of the classroom to assist students succeed in a more independent style of learning and is an effective initiative to support commencing students (Nelson & Kift, 2005). Ten years on from this initial work, QUT's ability to successfully action cross-institutional integration has been the shared vision within existing organisational structures inlcuding both academic and professional staff (Kift, 2008). The prediction of real transformation of embedded institutional change has occurred in the last ten

years in larger institutions, but experienced slower progress in smaller, more contextualised universities (Kift et al., 2010). A further realisation in their research is that it is necessary to have the leadership of an academic to coordinate these initiatives.

The shift to embed effective FYE strategies has been a key focus at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) (Kift, 2015). In a practice report written by the associated drivers of Transition Pedagogy, Egea, Griffiths, and McKenzie (2014), describe the success of the FYE Project at UTS as a result of the ability to "engage and support academics to address student transition and diversity" (p.103). The UTS FYE framework has enabled strategies from the third generation of Transition Pedagogy to be unpacked through a variety of strategies, most significantly, the appointment of an academic FYE Coordinator. This coordinator oversees the implementation of FYE Forums, the FYE grant scheme and supports the First Year Transition Experience (Egea et al., 2014). A learning community has evolved from these strategies and resulted in staff becoming champions for the FYE.

Kift's third generation of Transition Pedagogy also sits in international practice. For example, in Scotland, the literature is consistent in expressing the two main arteries of learning support; support through co-curricular initiatives via learning centres and curricula initiatives through embedded institutional support in units of work in courses (Benske, Brown, & Whittaker, 2011). The university-wide strategic approach to enhance learning in the first year is successful when implementing a dual approach; via pre-entry/transition approach and via learning, teaching, assessment and feedback to encourage a reflection of current practice in learning support (Benske et al., 2011). The Glasgow Caledonian University are aiming to widen participation in academic engagement with the dual approach coupled with the

development of Transition Pedagogy through a program called "Moving Forward" (Benske et al., 2011). This sits neatly in Kift's third generation of Transition Pedagogy.

Deakin University in Victoria is encouraging support initiatives that attempt to bridge the gap in expectations between academics and students in the teaching and learning of academic skills (Goldingay et al., 2014). The strategy implemented to achieve this was to embed academic skills into the curriculum which provided a socially inclusive environment ensuring those students that required academic support where accessing assistance (Goldingay et al., 2014). Academic literacies are synonymous with study skills in this study and are defined as those skills that are necessary to successfully complete tertiary education (Goldingay et al., 2014). The initiative to embed academic skills into the curriculum was successful due to the collaboration and communication between academic literacy specialists and teaching staff which ensured continuing success and sustainability of the strategy (Goldingay et al., 2014).

Another example of Transition Pedagogy in action is a case study at the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle that identified students who used a Certificate IV to meet minimum entry requirements as lacking in extended reading and writing tasks for an undergraduate degree (McNaught, 2013). As a result of this lack of educational experience, a compulsory intervention program was developed to assist with the deficiency in reading and writing (McNaught, 2013). The success of the intervention was due to the mandated, tailored support, embedded in a core unit (McNaught, 2013). The students that needed support who would not normally seek support benefited from this type of initiative and were able to continue with their degree with appropriate academic skills to successfully complete their undergraduate studies (McNaught, 2013).

Also of importance during this time was research related to engagement (Zepke &

Leach, 2010) and the attempt to identify engagement construct factors that support student

success in higher education. The general conclusion from these studies explained how student

engagement was not just one dimensional but a multifaceted experience and therefore,

required a multifaceted approach (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

2.2.1.4 Fourth Generation

Penn-Edward and Donnison (2014) are proposing the fourth generation that is more

about the wider community investing in the students' academic experience. The fourth

generation is attempting to move beyond the higher institution and develop the notion of

making all stakeholders accountable for supporting the first year student. While it is early in

fourth generation research to have substantive findings on this aspect, it seems that the fourth

generation focus is particularly applicable to potentially marginalised students such as those

who are recent immigrants to Australia (Penn-Edward & Donnison, 2014).

In summary, whole institution approaches to transition should be supportive and

engaging and more importantly "comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated" (Kift, 2014,

p.2). There is evidence that strategies from the generations within the Transition Pedagogy

theoretical framework should be included within the curriculum or embedded within first year

units so students have access to best practice for academic success. This notion is particularly

relevant in a diverse population where students starting a degree may be the first in their

family to access higher education (Zapke, Leach & Butler, 2009). It is important that all

students find ways to adjust to the culture of higher education but equally important is the

responsibility of university institutions to assist this process and provide opportunities for

students to adjust (Zapke et al., 2009). In addition to providing equity for all students, due

diligence must be applied so all commencing students to have the chance to access support, particularly groups who are underrepresented in higher education (Nelson et al., 2012b).

2.3 Initiatives to Enhance Transition

Much of the literature suggests the FYE impacts largely on student decisions to continue in tertiary studies (McNaught & Beal, 2012). Commencing students arrive with multiple identities in demographics, preparedness for higher education and misgivings about aspects of university life in general (Murray, 2011). The following section will review evidenced based practice trends and initiatives for structures of support in higher education institutions internationally, in Australia and more locally in Sydney. These initiatives are implemented with the aim to assist students academically succeed and remain in higher education to pursue a future working as a professional in their chosen career.

2.3.1 Early Identification

What has been shown across all generations of the theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy is the importance of early identification of students in need of support if they are to persevere in their studies. Early intervention (Nelson et al., 2012a; Jackson & Read, 2012) is the most successful and practical strategy of retaining students in their studies. Flagging and contacting students is the foundation of the success of these early identification programs because they are proactive rather than reactive and institutions that initiate individual contact with students rather than passively waiting for students to refer themselves (or waiting for academic staff referrals) have higher retention rates (Jackson & Read, 2012). The early identification and the provision of early support has been achieved in various initiatives across higher education institutions nationally and internationally.

At QUT, for example, the 'Student Success Program' is a proactive intervention program designed to support commencing students. Academically at-risk students are flagged through a CMS as a result of certain behaviours such as failure to submit an assignment or failure in their first assignment (Nelson et al., 2009). Similarly, Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has developed an initiative called 'Connect 4 Success' and also utilises a CMS to flag students based on certain criteria such as enrolment data and pre-determined causes which automatically identify students who are likely to require extra support in their studies (Jackson & Read, 2012). In the same way, the University of Sydney have an early intervention program called 'Track and Connect' that identifies key markers, such as; demographic information and on-time data to provide specific advice and support to targeted first year students from trained senior peers to encourage engagement and retention (Barnes, Macalpine & Munro, 2015). The 'Track and Connect' initiative has been a success, as evidence of its fifth cycle, however, it is only with the constant evaluation by the stakeholders involved that enable such programs to succeed due to continual adaptation and refinement of processes and delivery (Barnes et al., 2015).

In the quest for early identification, Western Sydney University, also utililse a CMS system that flags students who fail to submit an assignment, whereupon the student is contacted by phone or face-to-face for support and advice (Burnett & Larmar, 2011). Similarly, an initiative at Griffith University used students' performances on their first assignments as the means of early identification. This is informed by research (*cf.* Boud, 2010) showing that assessments drive students to learn and it is how students process success. In this initiative, students who just passed or failed their first assessment task were invited to participate in a two-stage process: completing a reflective workbook and participating in a

follow up one-on-one sessions with a tutor (Burnett & Larmar, 2011). Griffith University's

initiative brings an additional dimension, in that it is specifically aimed at promoting students'

self-regulation, an important factor in ongoing success (Lizzio & Wilson, 2013).

Other universities wait for unit failure or poor academic performance before initiating

intervention programs, perhaps working on the premise that higher institutions encourage

students to be independent, self-directed learners (Kokkinn & Maher, 2011). These initiatives

are still considered to be a form of early identification support as they are prior to student

decisions to drop out of university (Kokkinn & Maher, 2011). The University of Adelaide

introduced an early intervention program to combat the lack of adequate results in core units

in two schools of study and the early withdrawal of a large proportion of students before

census date (Kokkinn & Maher, 2011). Students targeted for these type of programs were

those with unsatisfactory academic performance and poor attendance (Johnston, 2011).

Students were contacted by learning advisers at two critical points of contact; just before

census date and after the first assessment (Johnston, 2011). This study recommends that all

advisors need to avail themselves to address the challenges and contribute to institutional

change by recognising their work can make a difference to students transitioning to tertiary

studies (Johnston, 2011). Prior to the intervention program students only had access to events

in generation two of Kift's Transition Pedagogy framework, such as orientation week. Limited

activities such as information sessions, transition to university sessions and organised

entertainment to encourage social interaction where unsuccessful in making a real impact in

supporting students (Johnston, 2011).

Coupled with initiatives to identify academic issues early is the aspiration to encourage

a sense of belonging to the institution for students, also as early as possible (O'Keeffe, 2013).

RMIT University has focused on this key factor of retention and believe a sense of belonging to their higher education institution encourages students to complete their studies (O'Keeffe, 2013). Students most at risk of non-completion according to O'Keeffe (2013) are; part-time students, first year students, first generation students, students with disabilities, students with mental health issues and students from ethnic backgrounds. To create a sense of belonging, O'Keeffe (2013) cited a caring, supportive and welcoming environment as desirable conditions. In addition, this can be facilitated by "positive student/faculty relationships, a well-resourced counselling centre and encouragement of diversity and difference" (O'Keeffe, 2013, p.605). The findings of this research strongly support the idea that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to create a welcoming environment in order to encourage students to complete their studies (O'Keeffe, 2013).

Some students have the ability to identify academic weaknesses early in themselves, however, this is usually based on recognised enablers to transition known as intrinsic and extrinsic measures (Bowles et al., 2014). Student perceptions in the FYE, particularly in the first semester impact largely on student decisions to continue or discontinue their studies (Bowles et al., 2014). Successful students bring intrinsic measures to higher institutions and transition enablers noted in this research from Griffith University on the Gold Coast recognised positive behaviours connected to study such as effort and culture as part of a student's intrinsic character (Bowles et al., 2014). Students have some control over these measures and can make important decisions related to transition including timely access to academic support, commitment to study and willingness to embrace the culture of the University (Bowles et al., 2014). The extrinsic measures are led by the university and these include orientation, learning at university, facilities and social connections (Bowles et al.,

2014). Ideally, the research revealed that extrinsic measures need to be tailored to meet the needs of students (Bowles et al., 2004). This included the ability to identify academic weaknesses early and access support from web-based resources such as technology continues to be a dominant feature of learning in this modern era (Bowles et al., 2014).

Another useful aspect of early identification of student needs is the impact student expectations can have on transition, particularly in relation to academic and information literacies (Kokkinn & Maher, 2011). The University of South Australia is implementing initiatives to support student needs in regard to meeting university expectations. The expertise of staff in academic (learning advisors/officers) and information literacies (librarians) show the critical connection between research and writing assignments and the need to assist students early in the semester to ensure academic achievement (Kokkin & Maher, 2011). A further type of learning support examined in this study is the discipline specific delivery where staff in separate units such as learning advisors/officers and librarians work closely with academic staff and unit coordinators to deliver strategic and systematic support to large first year cohorts to maximise the impact of limited resources (Kokkin & Maher, 2011). The close collaboration and nurturing of relationships with academic staff and staff in units (learning advisors and librarians) underpin the success of program based support for students (Kokkin & Maher, 2011).

In summary, there appears to be a move away from generation one and two of Kift's Transition Pedagogy theoretical framework due to the lack of effectiveness of one-off isolated support initiatives (Jackson & Read, 2012). As an alternative, research in higher education institutions have supported the effectiveness of a centrally coordinated system that enables support via university-wide early intervention and an approach to target a range of available

predictors of retention through a CMS. These predictors include such factors as study load, socioeconomic status, gender, basis of admission, study mode, previous grades, grades of first assignment, subsequent assessments, extension requests, late submission of assignment, non-submission of assignments, Learning Management Systems usage, encumbered academic status, inactive and intermitting students, minority groups and referrals from academic staff (Jackson & Read, 2012; Barnes et al., 2015; Grebennikov & Shah, 2012: O'Keeffe, 2013).

2.3.2 Appointment of Specific Staff for FYE Initiatives

One significant change contributing to improved outcomes for transitioning students, in some higher education institutions, is the appointment of a FYE Director or First Year Coordinating Team (Kift, 2008; Burnett & Larmar, 2011). The FYE Director is assigned to coordinate the various areas of the university into an integrated unit of support for commencing students (Kift, 2008; Burnett & Larmar, 2011). A further task for the FYE Director is to build consensus-based policy enhancements to support and enable implementation of first year transition initiatives and to utilise the strong base of existing practice already present in the institution (Kift, 2008).

The first year advisers at Murdoch University have developed a Practice Report to describe the initiatives undertaken to ensure successful improvements in the FYE (Wojcieszek et al., 2014). Interestingly, the Practice Report attributes the positive results of their FYE to the same success formula utilised by Deakin University which is the collegial network of relationships and communication between staff in units (learning advisors and librarians) academics and professional staff (Wojcieszek et al., 2014). It is also noted that the establishment of "networks and collaborative communities takes time, but is essential" for the enhancement of the FYE for students (Wojcieszek et al., 2014, p.150).

In Queensland at QUT, the FYE Director obtained specific data collections, such as an orientation survey and the first year experience survey to assist with policy development and support for the faculty and staff directing initiatives (Kift, 2008). Additional data were collected from exit surveys conducted with graduands who could provide advice from reflection on their tertiary experience. Some examples of initiatives coordinated by the FYE Director at QUT include, the First Year Teaching and Support Enabling Project which set in place organisational policies, structure and processes to raise the profile of the first year teaching and support among staff to ensure that conscious practices are put in place for best outcomes for the FYE (Kift, 2008). Another initiative is the First Year Students Project where students are monitored for (dis)engagement during the semester to ensure the intervention of practical support is delivered prior to final results (Kift, 2008).

Similarly, Western Sydney University has followed a like strategy of appointing an academic FYE Advisor and a First Year Management Team to initiate, develop and coordinate appropriate initiatives in assisting students' transition to tertiary studies (Burnett & Larmar, 2011). These initiatives include provision of practice for students to gain a sense of connectedness, capability, resourcefulness, purpose and academic to assist in their first year (Burnett & Lamar, 2011). The FYE advisor works closely with Schools to assist and promote initiatives that will impact the FYE to encourage success for students. One example from a School at Western Sydney University is extending the orientation week program beyond the traditional week to include activities specially designed by an appointed School orientation committee (Burnett & Lamar, 2011). Orientation to this School provides formal and informal opportunities for socialisation and activities are designed to foster and build peer connections (Burnett & Lamar, 2011). Familiarity with the university and the development of strategies

designed to build social connection and provide support enable students to flourish in a

tertiary environment (Burnett & Lamar, 2011). The opportunity to meet academic and support

staff as well as an introduction to the array of services available at the university is also key in

ensuring students feel relaxed and welcome (Burnett & Lamar, 2011). Institution-wide

initiatives at Western Sydney University have also been effective with the introduction of the

First Year Management Team that meet frequently to oversee the coordination of curriculum

design, review and assessment (Burnett & Larmar, 2011). It is also a key role of this team to

ensure consistent information are disseminated to first year students (Burnett & Larmar,

2011).

Such universities, have been slowly moving in the direction of generation three of

Kift's Transition Pedagogy as a result of evidenced-based research findings over the last

decade and the implementation of institution-wide initiatives to effectively support students in

their studies (Egea et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Importance of Social Interaction

Transition to higher education for students present not only academic challenges but

also socio-cultural challenges (Morosanu et al., 2010). Highlighted frequently in the FYE

literature is the research concerned with the retention and attrition of students and the ability

to adapt to the socio-cultural environment of their institution (Morosanu et al., 2010; Rodrigo

et al., 2014; Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015). A popular and effective initiative utilised in many

institutions is the implementation of peer mentoring programs to encourage the social

interaction of students (Morosanu et al., 2010; Heirdsfield et al., 2008).

The positive effects of peer mentoring for first year students have been well researched

and include such benefits as social support and networking, reduced stress, increased sense of

belonging, identity with the institution, early knowledge of resource information and improved retention (Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015; Callcott, Knaus, Warren, & Wenban, 2014). This research also advocates the presence of certain factors for the success of the mentoring relationship, these include, "clarifying goals and roles; matching mentor and mentees; training mentors; sufficient resources; and monitoring and evaluation" (Lloyd & Bristol cited in Heirdsfield et al., 2008, p. 3).

A peer mentoring program supports FYE students at the University of New South Wales and highlights effective support for commencing students by creating ambassadors in more experienced students (Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015). In addition, the program assists learning experiences through a collaborative exchange of information and creates an early connection for commencing students to their institution and the processes within it (Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015). The research associated with this program stressed the preference of an embedded model of peer support combined with regular evaluation measures to ensure appropriate adjustment and improvements of current support programs will benefit students from research-led approaches (Zamberlan & Wilson, 2015).

The University of Sydney and Edith Cowan University have developed a slightly different approach to harness the social benefits of peer mentoring for commencing students. A 'Mentoring Network' consisting of a group of academics from several faculties has been created by the University of Sydney to deliver a community of practice combined with support from Student Support Services to maintain additional "centralised support component into their faculty-specific training programs" (Rodrigo et al., 2014, p.111). The longevity of the 'Mentoring Network' shows evidence of the success of the program and students rated the program highly due to the combination of face-to-face training of mentors, online training and

the ongoing mentor support received from both faculty staff and student support service staff (Rodrigo et al., 2014). Edith Cowan University developed a similar program founded on a team-based program called 'Network Teach', designed to build social capital by establishing supportive social collegial networks to retain students in their studies (Budgen, Main, Callcott, & Hamlett, 2014; Callcott et al., 2014). Students commence at university from different backgrounds and internal factors such as academic preparedness and education experience can be associated with social and cultural capital which can impact on a student's success at university (Budgen et al., 2014). Initiatives developed to support students socially confirm much of what the literature has already noted in regards to social interaction; when students have a strong social network and feel a sense of belonging to the institution they are more likely to experience academic success and remain in their studies (Budgen et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2009).

A strong focus on the importance of the social network approach is not just found in Australia. For example, at Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom, students appear to overcome the majority of the milestones associated with starting university such as moving out, share accommodation, part-time work and generally taking care of themselves since leaving the family home due to a supportive social network (Morosanu et al., 2010). There, the support of peer assisted learning bridges the formal and informal networks and is described as support 'from above' and support 'from below' (Morosanu et al, 2010). Support from above include academic staff, support staff and general information and facilities; support from below can come in many forms such as university contacts (peers, flatmates and informal study groups) and non-university contacts such as family friends and work colleagues (Morosanu et al., 2010). Recognising support from both formal and informal

sources can assist academic performance and may help identify factors that assist students in their studies.

Social interaction has been encouraged across numerous universities by utilising the social media platform of Facebook and the like to encourage commencing students to communicate (Jenkins et al., 2012). This transition initiative complements the embedded approach of enhancing the first year curriculum experience for supporting students.

2.3.4 Transition or Preparatory Courses

Initiatives specifically designed to address transitions needs, particularly in regard to preparation for tertiary studies have also been effective in higher institutions for the majority of incoming students not just those at-risk or in marginalised groups (Adam et al., 2010). Not all initiatives have the desired outcome from the outset. For example, the University of Wyoming in the USA recognised that supporting at-risk students is a multi-faceted process that does not necessarily begin when students arrive on campus (Stewart & Heaney, 2013). Consequently, in an attempt to support students who have not met traditional entry requirements, a letter outlining the support they must access during the semester was sent by mail and student reactions were negative and unfavourable (Stewart & Heaney, 2013). While the delivery of information mandating academic support is necessary, students felt that such information only highlighted their academic deficiencies and had a negative effect on self-perception, creating perceived stigma in regard to accessing support (Stewart & Heaney, 2013). As a consequence of their study, the university revised how they communicated the conditional status to students to create a more positive impression to the idea of participating in academic support programs to ensure they succeed in their studies (Stewart & Heaney, 2013).

A more successful pre-undergraduate preparatory program at the University of Southern Queensland has been the provision of a "welcoming and encouraging classroom environment, invitations to reflect on the progress of learning, tailoring assessment tasks to build on students prior experiences and additional opportunities to reinforce required information in the respective course in the program" (Coombes, Danaher & Danaher, 2013, p.34). The University of Tasmania has a similar initiative, however it differs in that delivery was via an integrated approach, utilising face-to-face and online platforms to various disciplines to assist successful transition (Adam et al., 2010). The effectiveness of this program impacted positively on students' engagement and confidence but more critically supported students in feeling more prepared to face the academic challenges of higher education (Adam et al., 2010).

Transition programs can also be optional, however, such programs do not always attract the students they are designed to target. Murdoch University in Western Australia has an optional transition program (UniEdge) which is designed to foster a sense of community, to increase awareness of support strategies and build confidence and preparedness of new students (Lefroy, Wojcieszek, MacPherson, & Lake, 2014). The program experienced some difficulties in low student attendance rates and it became clear that the students attending were high achieving, conscientious students and the students needing the support the most, did not attend (Lefroy et al., 2014). As often is the case with one-off support programs, couched in generation one or two of Kift's theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy, students do not always value the service or recognise the benefits. As a result of student feedback, UniEdge was recycled three times in different formats to the current format of a series of EXPOS instead of seminars (Lefroy et al., 2014). Consequently, increased student attendance has

captured a number of students from diverse backgrounds who have benefited the most from such a program (Lefroy et al., 2014).

In summary, this section highlights that there were positive and negative outcomes associated with transition and preparatory courses. The discussion of these types of initiatives are relevant to interpretation of the data in the current study.

2.3.5 Combating Tradition in Higher Education

Although combating tradition in higher education is not a specific support initiative, it has become a catalyst for the implementation of specific initiatives to assist current cohorts in higher education. Traditionally, in the middle of last century, university students typically came straight from high school with high grades and a high socio-economic background with adequate cultural capital to encourage confidence, academic focus and a promising start to an academic experience. In contrast, the last two decades have witnessed a much more diverse type of student, already described in this literature review, many of whom are non-traditional with less or different cultural capital or support (Munro, 2011). As a result, many students find themselves in the position where they have to work to support themselves and consequently end up studying full time and working almost full time. Research focussed on concern for students as paid worker and scholar due to the detrimental effect this seemed to have on their academic performance (Munro, 2011). She found that an additional burden for the non-traditional student gaining entry through alternative pathways or for less academic student need to be aware of the expectation that tertiary students also need to be independent learners. Commodification of education, where customers need to be gratified because they are paying, creates an environment where students demand their money's worth. Some students want to pass their course with a minimum of effort – "PASSes [Ps] get degrees" – and believe that

"fees get degrees" (Munro, 2011, p.128). This research suggests that some students may not be serious scholars.

Another consequence of the expansion of entry to higher education, is the increase of participation of mature age students (Walsh, Larsen, & Parry, 2009). Although mature aged students have been found to be more focussed than their younger counterparts, they are also more willing to seek support from an academic tutor, often out of necessity, due to time constraints with outside responsibilities and employment rather than seeking specialised help (Walsh et al., 2009). The increase in mature age students has enabled greater research to be carried out on why mature age students often achieve more successfully than their younger counterparts (Sheard, 2009). The age factor appears to be beneficial in success in academic performance because according to Sheard (2009) mature age students were found to be more motivated, conscientious, willing to work, persistent, critically reflective and possess a greater sense of self efficacy. These findings provide valuable information when predicting academic success and also have implications for university support services.

2.3.6 Individual Support

Other universities, such as the University of Tasmania, offer more traditional support of one-on-one appointments when students self-refer for assistance with an academic advisor or officer. On evaluating this type of support, this research questions how this strategy can be extended to meet the needs of students' academically at-risk (Brown et al., 2009). Academic literacies at the University of Tasmania is defined as "study skills, writing support and courses in academic English" (McDowell in Brown et al., 2009, p.2). Research revealed the development of these skills as mainly specific to first year and also reinforce how individual appointments offer the opportunity for each student's specific needs to be catered for,

therefore, addressing a range of individual differences (Brown et al., 2009). The appointments offered "just in time needs" to be met by addressing contextual needs of the student (Brown et al., 2009). The evidence collected from Brown et al., (2009) identified how much the appointments were valued by attending students and how the individual appointments satisfied a range of issues.

The main literacy issues for students continue to revolve around essay writing, analysing the question and referencing which is why the notion of embedding these skills in a pre-semester transition program has led to success for those students who did self-refer to the program (Brown et al., 2009). A particularly important finding of theirs was the fact that the individual appointments were not just accessed for remedial support but also to gain extra marks for academically competent students. A further finding regarding self-referral meant that students had to determine in what areas they may need assistance and then be comfortable in seeking support. Consequently, some students may not access the support they require. One final finding of significance was the fact that many students were extremely positive about this style of support but continued to be unaware about the details of the existence of the support and the location in their institution (Brown et al., 2009). In other words, more students could have been accessing the service had they been aware of its existence and location. In summary, in this model of support, staff need to provide the appropriate services and ensure they communicate those services as early as possible to students to ensure students access support when required (Brown et al., 2009).

2.3.7 Diagnostic Support

To provide a background to the emergence of diagnostic support as a structure of support in higher education institutions, the English Language Competence of International

Student's Symposium in 2007 and 2013, mentioned earlier in this literature review, supported and recommended an inclusion of "a more generalised use of the English language diagnostics tests (for all students) including post entry" (IEAA, 2013, p.17). The Post Entrance Literacy Assessment (PELA) is defined by Dunworth (2013) as an evaluation of students' English development needs. This assessment allows for the early identification and therefore early intervention shown to be so important in the first year of study (Harris 2013). Negative reactions from students surrounding a mandated PELA is unhelpful since an optional PELA would miss the students who might benefit the most (Ransom, 2009). PELA needs to be administered in a non-discriminatory, compulsory format so a wide range of commencing students can benefit from academic language support as early as possible in their studies (Ransom, 2009). Essentially, the PELA serves as an important structure of support for higher education institutions because it serves a twofold purpose; identification of students' strengths and weaknesses and a guide for teaching pedagogy for teachers (Dunworth, 2013; Read, 2015). In addition, if the PELA is a diagnostic tool already in place, it should be utilised and strengthened to its greatest potential (McNaught & Shaw, 2016).

2.4 Conclusion

"Accessing university has always been a fundamental issue for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the recent context of an expanding higher education system in Australia, some accessibility issues have been alleviated. The move to a demand-driven system of funding university places has been a key policy influencing this outcome" (Edwards & McMillan, 2015, p.1)

Australia continues to advance in the context of multifaceted issues and national policy reforms with an increasing number of students enrolling in the higher education sector (Wahr

et al., 2009). In this current tertiary backdrop of greater accessibility of higher education, commencing students require greater social and academic support to transition successfully to higher education. If higher education institutions are to accept students into courses of study there is an ethical and moral obligation to provide proactive support with the equity of opportunity necessary for all students to succeed (Kift, 2008). The future challenge for the tertiary sector in the 21st century internationally, nationally and locally is how best to transform the extensive research and theory uncovered in the last few decades into effective institutional action. There has never been a greater time or need to implement sustained institutional change for commencing students with the diverse cohorts entering tertiary education (Jenkins et al., 2012).

Against this backdrop, the current study identifies what enablers and inhibitors determine student access to ASO services at one university. Furthermore it established what recommendations will be the most effective for the University in meeting the needs of commencing students. The methodology and methods utilised to ascertain these data, are discussed in chapter three.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the research design of this study and justifies why this methodology and these methods were chosen to elicit the most relevant data in relation to the research questions (Willig, 2013). In this section I discuss research design, methodology, research methods, data collection methods, and design for data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter covers sample selection and a description of the pilot studies. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and data protection are also discussed.

The three research questions are as follows:

3.1.1 Research Questions

1. What factors enable or inhibit student access to ASO services?

2. How can UNDA better assist students transitioning into first year?

3. What suggestions do students provide that will enhance access (earlier access) to ASO services?

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Aspects

3.2.1 Qualitative Dominant

This study takes place predominantly in the qualitative paradigm in which the natural setting provides the data, hence the term *naturalism* (Mertens, 2015). Qualitative research is epitomised by inductive analysis, where details and specifics of the data produce important interrelationships, categories and dimensions. Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2011) describe naturalism as allowing multiple realities arising from natural differences in the development

of human perception provided most effectively through the words of the participants. However, in order to establish baseline data in the current study, a survey was piloted on three occasions. This provided a limited amount of quantitative data that proved useful to the study; the key outcome was the analysis of trends from the survey that guided the development of the interview questions.

3.3 Methodology

This study is an interpretative case study (Cohen et al., 2011) providing descriptive accounts of student perceptions. The research in this study is descriptive because it is designed to gain a better understanding of students' behaviour in relation to accessing ASO services. A secondary aim is to enhance the efficacy of ASO services. Information derived from this research will inform new or future adaptations to current ASO practices and processes to encourage all students to access ASO services when required. The qualitative measures enabled me as researcher to be sensitive to the participants and how they see the world, which is key information for staff supporting students.

This study utilised an interpretive case study methodology since it provided a detailed account of a particular group of students and the overarching reasons for their access behaviour and attitudes towards ASO services. The most advantageous aspect of conducting a case study is that it can simplify complex issues (Yin, 2009). The case study can expose participants to new and effective ways of looking at a situation or issue that is relevant to them, consequently assisting and benefiting them (Yin, 2009). In the instance of this research, some students required access to timely assistance and support from ASO services to transition successfully through their first year.

My role, as the researcher, was to provide an accurate account of the case by carefully looking at the evidence of students' behaviours and attitudes that capture the characteristics of this case (Willig, 2013). In this case study, data were collected from a cross-disciplinary group of first year undergraduate students at UNDA to ensure the most relevant data were accessed to address the research questions (Willig, 2013).

The context and the case study can be represented as follows:

THE CONTEXT

STUDENTS ACCESSING ASO SERVICES

School of Arts and Science

School of Business

School of Education

School of Law

School of Nursing
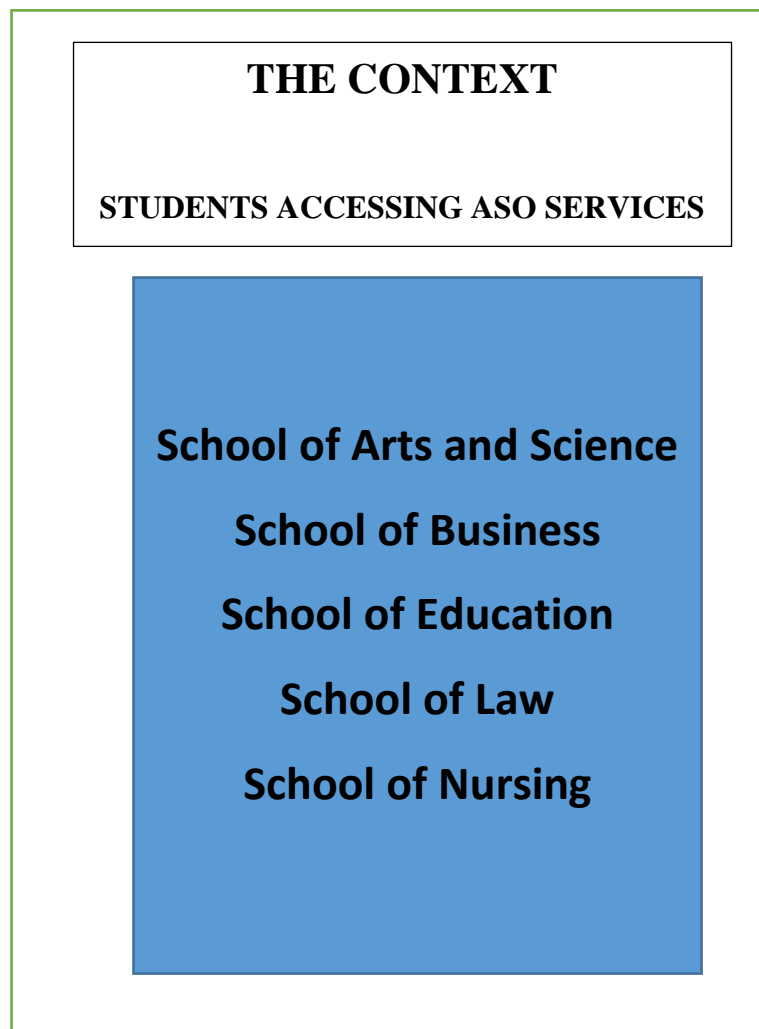
3.4 Research Methods

This study collected data through surveys and group or individual interviews.

3.4.1 Surveys

The benefits of surveys is that they provide information on a broad selection of topics (Tingley, 2014). Surveys enable researchers to identify barriers so clear inferences can be made about the research questions (Tingley, 2014).The success of surveys relies on how well the survey captures real-situation beliefs and behaviours of the participants (Tingley, 2014).

A strong advantage of direct surveys – where the researcher provides the survey to participants in person – is the ability to collect data from large sample sizes of people reasonably quickly and inexpensively (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014). Other advantages include the collection of responses from a normally hard to reach population of participants and assurance that instructions are followed and questions clarified (Ary et al., 2014). Disadvantages of administering this type of survey is the inconvenience to teaching staff by interrupting teaching and learning during tutorials and lectures (Tingley, 2014). The first pilot of this survey, however, demonstrated that participants on average needed only 15 minutes to complete the survey, so the interruption was minimalised.

A drawback related to the use of data collected from surveys is that participants may potentially only reveal what they want you to know about their opinions, beliefs and behaviours, not the behaviours themselves (Ary et al., 2014). The initiative to pilot the survey three times has mitigated against this potential negative result. The first pilot was a paper survey and was administered in an ASO workshop in semester one. As researcher, I was attempting to keep the survey short, just two pages and 10 questions to reduce completion

time and encourage a higher response rate, however, it became evident that more questions were required to elicit more focused responses for the research questions. The second pilot was also completed on paper and had a total of 20 questions and was trialed in a second-year class of 40 students in the School of Arts and Science early in semester two. On the basis of this second pilot, a further four questions were added to create a 24 question survey to ensure all aspects of the research questions would be addressed. The third pilot was to provide the survey to experienced academic staff and researchers for their feedback. Further amendments were effected and the final version of the survey questions was complete (Appendix A). By completing three pilot surveys I was able to adjust the survey more accurately to reflect feedback from staff and students on three separate occasions, ensuring, the appropriate rigour was applied to the creation and relevance of the questions.

A significant finding discovered during the pilot studies was the recognition that if students were introduced to the research as a valuable tool to improve their university's procedures and practice, they seemed more willing to answer questions reflectively and honestly.

Response rates for surveys is always a consideration in research. Directly administered surveys might yield higher completion rates (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), however, feedback from piloted students suggested that an online version was preferred to a paper-based survey. The majority of students owned and used portable devices and viewed this technology as a trustworthy currency of information exchange. Emailing the survey to students was considered, however, surveys sent via email requesting information from participants are likely to experience low completion rates (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Yin, 2009; Ary et al., 2014). Consequently, as researcher, I made an informed decision based on previous research

findings and evidence from my pilot studies to combine a directly administered survey via an online program. This data-gathering technique allowed me to be present in the classroom for the duration of the survey to encourage completion and provide assistance or clarification to participants when requested. The software program utilised was Survey Monkey and had the capability to deliver an online anonymous survey and the ability to ease the data analysis process by generating automated results. Data collected through surveys were analysed using descriptive and inductive (inferential) statistics (Cohen et al., 2011). The survey also included some open-ended questions which were analysed thematically.

3.4.2 Interviews

"Group interview is one of the valuable tools for collecting qualitative data" (Dilshad & Latif, 2013, p.191). Compared to other techniques, group interviews develop a shared understanding and provide a variety of perspectives on a given topic if they are conducted appropriately by diligent researchers (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). They can provide a more natural social environment because participants influence each other just as they do in real life interaction (Krueger and Casey, 2009). In this study, an added benefit of social interaction in the group interviews were the enhanced and extended responses given by participants beyond the interview question (Ary et al., 2014). Group interviews can encourage quieter members to disclose information in a collective setting, however, at the same time the opposite is possible with sensitive issues where some participants will lack disclosure (Ary et al., 2014).

The interviewer decided the sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview. However, occasionally in individual interviews, flexibility of sequencing is greater which can result in substantially different responses (Johnson & Christiensen, 2012). The disadvantage of this phenomenon in individual interviews can be the reduction in the

comparability of responses of participants (Johnson & Christianson, 2012). To counteract this, individual interviews in this current study provided a conversational opportunity for participants to feel relaxed and generous in their responses without much prompting (Johnson & Christianson, 2012). Additionally, only two participants chose to take part in an individual interview; the rest took part in group interviews. An observable drawback of interviewing participants can be the scheduling involved (Ary et al. 2014), particularly with group participants where finding a suitable time for people to meet can be impossible at times. Eight volunteers were interviewed before data saturation was achieved; two group interviews and two individual interviews.

The group and individual interviews achieved a collection of high-quality data to assist to understand a specific issue from the viewpoint of the participants in this study (Rabiee, 2004). The interview questions were developed to gain deeper insights during the group and individual interviews, however, initial questions posed were amended to reflect the data analysis of the survey responses. Consequently, the final interview questions were created after the participants completed the survey and I had the opportunity to analyses the responses more carefully (Appendix B). Of particular relevance were responses from the open-ended survey questions that helped narrow the focus of the questions in the interview sessions to support the research questions. The open-ended survey questions provided the most influence and the richest data for fine tuning the interview questions and these included the following:

3.4.2.1 Open-Ended Questions from the Survey that Guided the Interview Questions.

- o Question 13. If you were referred to the ASO, who referred you?

- o Question 14. Give the reason/s for your referral to the ASO, including reason/s for self-referral. Include reasons for your referral regardless of whether you came for an appointment or not (write NA for not applicable if you were never referred).

- o Question 17.Overall, are you satisfied with your ASO experience at this University? Explain why or why not?

- o Question 18. List one way the ASO could encourage students to access their services?

- o Question 22. If you could choose any type of help or support to assist a smoother transition to your studies in first year, what would it be?

The survey data provided focused themes to include in the interviews such as student preparation for tertiary studies, awareness of academic support services, marketing of ASO services, suggestion of transition strategies, and student reflection on challenging transition issues in first semester. After the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed providing a text-based ready-made transcript for analysis (Girvan, 2015). It was necessary to read the transcripts very carefully several times to establish accurate categories and themes. As these were interviews I conducted, I was already familiar with much of the content. However, it was sometimes difficult to follow a single person's contribution to the discussion in the transcription because at times there were two separate conversations going on simultaneously.

When reading the interview transcripts I remained open to emergent codes for thematic analysis rather than focusing on answers to the research questions (Girvan, 2015). During this period of analysis I highlighted both words and phrases and used this process for each interview transcript. While I was aware of the tentative themes and categories which had

emerged from the previous transcripts, I tried to put this knowledge to one side and look at each transcript separately so I could understand the perspective of each participant, before undertaking a cross-case analysis (Girvan, 2015).

3.5 Sample Selection

There are seven Schools of study at UNDA, Sydney, however, two schools were excluded based on dissimilar characteristics to other Schools that is, the School of Medicine and the School of Philosophy. The School of Medicine is a graduate entry course and students from this cohort have a different academic profile to undergraduate students. Secondly, the School of Philosophy and Theology have small numbers enrolled compared to the rest of the Schools and the mandatory core curriculum (Philosophy, Theology and Ethics) distort numbers and may duplicate participants. The five Schools in the study include; Arts and Science, Business, Education, Law, and Nursing and these Schools provide enough cross-discipline variety to capture rich data. It is not necessary to survey all students in the university to determine the factors that effect students' access to ASO services.

3.6 Research Process

Approval of the Deans in each of the participating Schools was gained to conduct the survey with first year students. Each of the five Dean's was sent an email requesting approval of the research (Appendix C). The Deans directive and the request to target first year, second semester students determined the classes available to complete the direct survey. Students were asked to complete a voluntary survey in nine targeted classes from first year, in the five Schools of study. Students completing the survey in class were asked to volunteer further to participate in a group interview.

The survey was administered in second semester, 2015, in weeks 4 and 5. Students were given the Survey Monkey URL address in class on the whiteboard and/or computer screen. This was the ideal timeframe to capture the information when first year students had experienced the rigour of the first semester of tertiary studies and had significant experience of the University setting. In addition, I believed that if current university procedures were effective, students should have awareness of ASO services by second semester. All students in each of the Schools had access to an electronic device to complete the questions, either a laptop, iPad or smart phone.

The purpose of the study was explained to students in the lecture or tutorial immediately prior to administration of the survey. It was explained to students that the first page of the survey included the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D) which highlighted again the voluntary nature of the survey. An interesting observation during the administration of the surveys was the introduction and participation of each academic to this study and their explanation to students. Some academics said very little and scheduled me at the end of their lecture and left the classroom after briefly introducing me. Other academics, specifically those in the School of Education, spent some time explaining the importance of research, particularly this research, because it could affect them and the services within the university provided for them.

Interview participants were recruited via a hard copy invitation distributed after completion of the survey. If students were interested they completed contact information, preferred days and times and returned the paper separately to a table at the back of the room. Participants interested in volunteering for an interview could not complete their details online because the contact information would have been connected to their survey answers and the

survey would no longer be anonymous. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio

recorded by the author of this study and then transcribed.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

This case study utilised the survey and interviews as an effective method of identifying

the factors that contributed to enabling or inhibiting access to ASO services for undergraduate

first year students. As a result of two types of data collection, I was able to confirm accuracy

of information (Willig, 2013) to identify behaviours and factors associated with access to

ASO services

3.7.1 Survey Data Analysis

The survey requested a range of information from participants to assess adequacy of

the sampling technique (Ary et al., 2014) and to gain an overview of the issues under

investigation so more detailed data from the interviews could be examined. Responses from

the survey enabled the exploration of thematic analysis of the latent themes that motivated

student behaviours. The use of the online program Survey Monkey eased data management by

providing accuracy due to the automated results generated. Survey Monkey had the capacity

to directly download data to Excel for immediate results.

Out of the 24 questions participants were asked to complete on the survey, 18 of the

questions were closed-ended questions (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,15,16,19,20,21,23 and 24).

The answers to closed-ended questions, generally, have one answer or limited options such as

Yes/No or True/False, or choose one among the few, such as in multiple choice questions

(Roberts et al., 2014). Researchers use closed-ended questions to see what people think and

are able to generate swift analysis of the answers (Roberts et al., 2014). The data from the

closed-ended questions were generated from Survey Monkey into horizontal bar graphs and

summary tables. An example has been provided below.

Table 3. 1 An example of the presentation of data for a closed-ended question from the survey
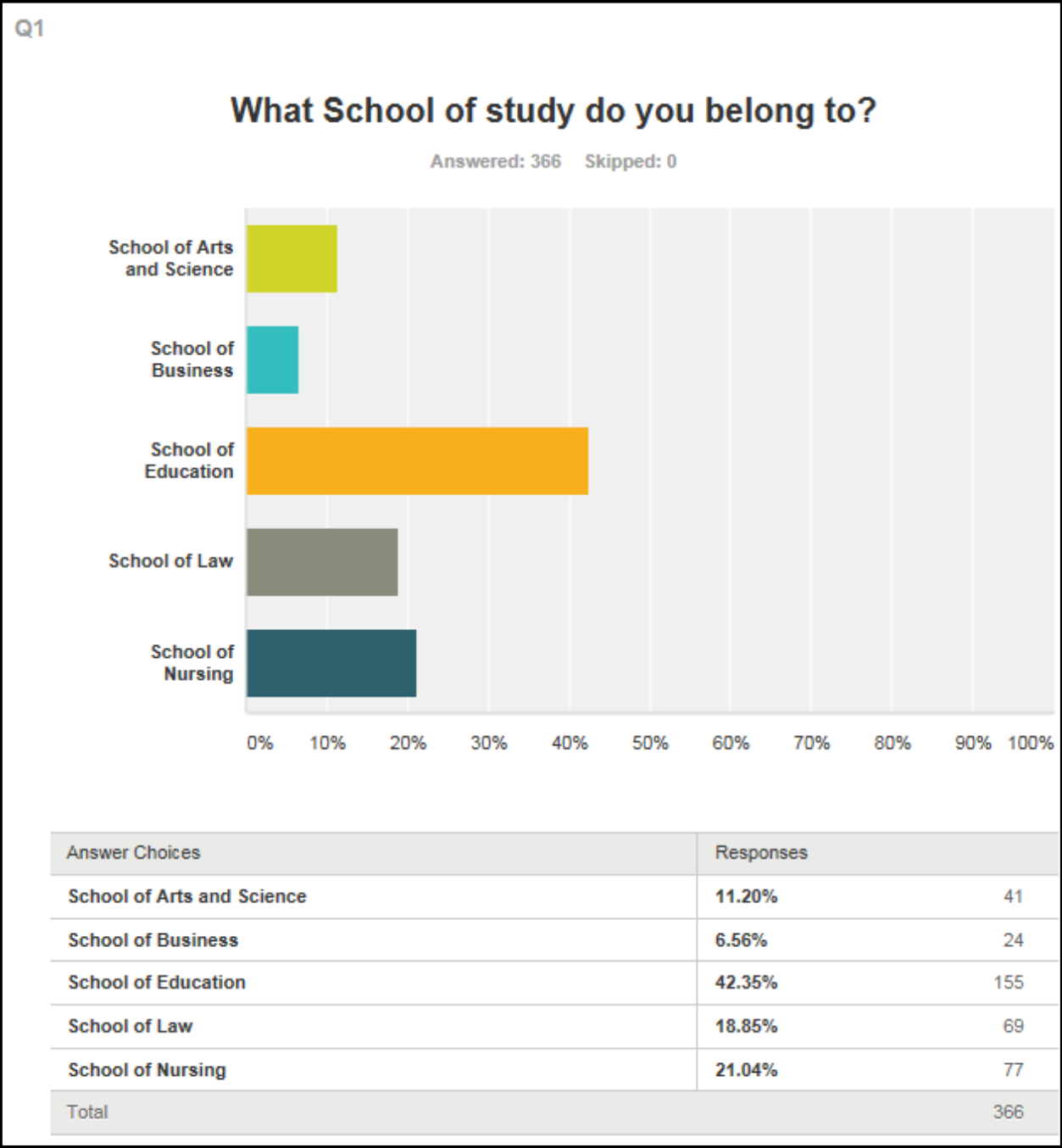
Survey Monkey generated the above table from question one of the survey. Also

shown under the question is how many participants answered this question (366) and how

many skipped this question (0). The horizontal bar graph shows the percentage of participants from each School of study that completed the question. The summary table underneath the bar graph provides exact percentages and numbers of participants from each School that completed this question.

The remaining five questions (13, 14, 17, 18 and 22) on the survey were open-ended questions. An open-ended question is a question that requires a more detailed, descriptive answer (Worley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). Researchers make use of both open-ended and close-ended questions to understand responses from the subjects through their questionnaires (Roberts et al., 2014)). Open-ended questions usually take longer to reach a conclusion, however, there are instances, such as in this study, when a researcher prefers to focus on open-ended questions as they generate more responses that are varied in content and can reveal more information about the participant (Worley, 2015).

Student responses for the five open-ended questions were downloaded to an Excel worksheet and responses were filtered into themes and categories. These themes where then put into a pivot table for each of the questions for further data analysis. Pivot tables in Excel are a versatile reporting tool that makes it easy to extract information from large tables of data (Bodhanwala, 2015). Pivot tables enabled me to move fields of data from one location to another so the same data can be viewed in a number of different ways (Bodhanwala, 2015). This was particularly useful in this survey since some of the open-ended questions were impacted by the "not-applicable" selection by respondents. To compensate, I created a pivot table eliminating the "not-applicable" (NA) and blank responses for each question to identify the significant responses. This provided clearer and more concise interpretations of the available data. An example of the presentation of data for responses from an open-ended

question from an Excel worksheet is shown below. The response count for this question is

shown at the top of the table; 230 participants answered this question and 136 participants

missed this question.

Table 3. 2 An example of the presentation of the data from an Excel worksheet for an open-ended question from the survey.

How would/does accessing the ASO services make you feel? Why?	
Response Count	
230	
230	
136	
Response Text ▾	**Categories**
NA, I can imagine some are grateful for the help but also feel insecure for needing it.	Stigma
supported at all times, but scared	Stigma
Nervous at first and turns into something worthwhile	Stigma
Kinda anxious, not sure if they are willing to help or not.	stigma
I am not confident about getting support I need	stigma
Not sure	Stigma
OK, not great	Stigma
Alright. But would prefer not to need it.	Stigma
Nervous. I don't want to be told "do it yourself" or I am not holding your hand"	Stigma
don't know, mixed feelings if I had to access ASO	Stigma
like I was not smart enough	Stigma

The above table shows a category in the right hand column allocated for each text response. I

have used the example of stigma (perceived stigma) from question 18 of the survey.

Table 3. 3 An example of the presentation of the data for an open-ended question from the survey, including "not-applicable" responses.

Categories	Number	Percent
NA	198	70%
Stigma	33	12%
Time Management	22	8%
Lack of ASO info	19	7%
Motivation	11	4%
Grand Total	283	100%

In the above table, there are five categories in the left hand column; one of these categories reads NA representing "not-applicable" responses. It was necessary to remove this from the data in most instances to gain a true result of the findings from participants that answered this question.

Table 3. 4 An example of the presentation of the data for an open-ended question from the survey, excluding "not-applicable" responses.

Categories	Number	Percent
Stigma	33	39%
Time Management	22	26%
Lack of ASO info	19	22%
Motivation	11	13%
Grand Total	85	100%

In the above table, with the "not-applicable" responses excluded, there are four categories in the left hand column: stigma, time management, lack of ASO information and motivation. The second column shows the number of participants whose responses fell within those categories and the third column shows these numbers as a percentage of respondents.

3.7.2 Interview Data Analysis

The interview questions were audio recorded and transcribed. The unit of analysis was the sentence. These were summarised and a category allocated. From the unit of analysis relevant themes emerged. An example is shown in the table below. The full interview analysis is provided in chapter 4 (see Table 4.11)

Table 3. 5 An example of responses from part of a group interview of four participants for question one.

Interview 1 (Four participants)			
1. How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?			
TEXT	**SUMMARY**	**CATEGORY**	**THEME**
I was not very prepared, I applied less than a week before starting, and I felt unprepared with resources.	Pressure of timing caused lack of preparedness	Transition	Preparedness due to lack of resources
I think I had a text book, I mean I didn't have my text books. I probably had pen and paper.	Lack of resources contributed to feeling unprepared.	Transition	Preparedness due to lack of resources
I was so anxious like I , like I know I had the capability to do it but I didn't feel prepared, I think because I didn't know what to expect.	Student felt anxious due to not knowing what to expect and this caused anxiety.	Transition	Preparedness due to expectations Anxiety about new expectations
Like I made friends eventually but for me just to know I had made the right decision that was probably the most important thing.	Making good decisions was more important than making friends.	Transition	Staff support with academic decisions
And I think they eased us into it, like in terms of all the subjects were structured really well.	The course is structured well for transition.	Transition	Scaffolding of units assists first year students

I think the only thing was maybe like they did say at the start, like go see … (ASO staff member) and they did say it but there wasn't the emphasis on it.	There should be more emphasis on accessing ASO services early.	Student suggestion	Access ASO services
And I always thought I will have to email her and I will have to wait a few weeks whereas when I eventually , hang on a minute I will and see … (ASO staff member) she emailed me straight back and I saw her the next day and that's not explained in the first few weeks and it should be.	Accessing ASO services was easier than expected and should be explained in the first few weeks.	Student suggestion	Access ASO services
I had to get an LAP (Learning Access Plan) and I think I waited like a few months to get info on it, so there was that idea that if you needed help you would have to go through this massive process where I think if they explained that a bit better in the first few weeks we probably would have got it earlier.	Accessing ASO services was easier than expected and should be explained in the first few weeks.	Student suggestion	Access ASO services
Like I didn't actually see … (ASO staff member) until the second semester and then I was like, "Dammit, I wish I had seen her for the other assessments".	Students felt regret about not accessing ASO services earlier.	Transition	Access ASO services

Transition
• Preparedness
o   Lack of resources
• Anxiety
o   New expectations
• Staff support
o   Scaffolding of units useful
o   Support with academic decisions
Student suggestions
• Access ASO services
o   Access earlier
o   Accessing easy

3.8 Ethics

Ethical clearance for this study was granted on the 18th June 2015, reference number 015085S.

3.8.1 Ethical Consideration

In relation to survey completion, while some students would have attended an individual appointment with me in the ASO, the surveys were completely anonymous, therefore there were no ethical issues. Nonetheless, there were ethical considerations to be aware of in this study since I coordinate ASO services on campus, specifically the power dynamic that could be perceived by students as being inherent when a lecturer is interviewing a student. However, the role I fulfill at the University is purely a support role. I never assess student work, nor allocate grades in their degrees.

It was not possible to provide complete anonymity for students who volunteered to participate in the group interviews since they would hear and see each other during the interview. Students in individual or group interviews were aware their opinions could in no way affect their academic progress. Data collection from the group interview was de-identified for

transcription. Students were informed in the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix D) and at the start of the interview that they could withdraw at any time without prejudice. I considered the option of collecting data from another university but the benefits of completing the survey at UNDA outweighed any drawbacks, particularly considering the findings can positively impact students at UNDA.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

4.1 Presentation of Data from Survey

Chapter four presents the findings from the quantitative and qualiative analysis. The quantitative analysis is detailed in the first section while the qualitative component is outlined in the second section. Included in the appendices is the survey questions (Appendix A) and the interview questions (Appendix B).

4.1.1 Quantitative Results

The survey received a total of 366 responses. The first five questions focused on demographic information about the participants. The highest participation rate from the five Schools of study from the survey was: Education (42.4%) followed by Nursing (21.0%), Law (18.9%), Arts and Science (11.2%) and Business (6.6%). There were more female participants, (76.8%) compared to male participants (23.2%). Further demographic information showed that 34.0% of respondents were the first in their families to study at university.

Participants came into UNDA via a variety of pathways, the most common being the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) at 66.1% followed by enabling Pathways (18.9%), mature age students (11.5%), Certificate IV/Diploma (5.4%), and finally the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) (1.6%).

Participants were also required to identify their socioeconomic status based on the definition of economic and social position in relation to others, considering income, education and occupation. The options were high, middle and low socio-ecomonic status. The majority of participants classified themselves at *middle* socio-economic status (80.1%), followed by *high* (15.4%) and *low* (4.4%).

Due to the majority of students entering university via an ATAR, question 6 asked participants to identify the ranking they received on their ATAR. This question did not apply to 16.5% (60 out of 364) of respondents due to the variety of pathways utilised, therefore they were omitted from the final percentages in Table 4.1. The highest percentage of participant responses for this question was 23.7% for students who received an ATAR of 85 or above. See Table 4.1 below, for the remaining results for the ATAR question. In the left hand column of the table are the ATAR ranking groups and in the right hand column of the table are the percentages of respondents in those groups in descending order.

Table 4. 1 ATAR and percentages of respondent answers for question six

ATAR	Percentage
85 or above	23.7%
75-84	23.0%
65-74	18.4%
51-64	22.1%
50 or less	12.8%

4.1.2 Results Related to ASO Services

Question seven asked whether students were aware of the lunch time Academic (study skills) Workshops presented by ASO during the semester. Of the respondents, 77.5% were aware of the Academic Workshops; 22.5% were not. Question eight asked whether students were aware of the lunch time Mathematics Workshops with even responses for yes and no (50%).

Question nine asked about student attendance at all the ASO workshops with a large percentage (84.1%), declaring zero attendance at workshops. The workshops are usually

presented four times a week for 10 weeks of each 13 week semester, totaling 40 workshops per semester. The percentage of students who attended 1-2 workshops was 11.3%; student attendance at 3-4 workshops was 3.3%; and students attending five or more workshops during a semester was 1.3%.

Apart from the workshops, another service offered by the ASO is individual appointments to assist and support students academically. Question 10 asked participants if they were aware they could make a booking with an Academic Support Officer from the ASO to assist them with their studies and university work. A total percentage of 57.5% said yes they were aware; 42.5% of respondents were unaware.

Question 11 asked students to identify one service of support they were aware that the ASO provided. They could make only one selection. The topic selected most frequently was academic obstacles (44.8%), followed by study skills issues (17.1%), and referencing (12.0%), then academic writing (10.4%). The lowest percentage (1.4%) was transition difficulties to tertiary education. This particular choice was not clearly defined so may have been misunderstood by respondents. These data are presented in Table 4.2 below; the list of ASO service options are down the left hand column of the table and percentage and number of respondents that selected each option are down the right hand column of the table.

Table 4. 2 Student awareness of topic assistance support from ASO services, question 11.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Academic obstacles (academic writing problems, understanding academic texts)	44.82%	160
Study skill issues	17.09%	61
Procrastination and distraction issues	5.60%	20
Transitiondifficulties to tertiary education	1.40%	5
Assignment checkprior to submission to check assignment criteria, academic writing and reference check.	3.64%	13
Help with getting started on assessment tasks	1.96%	7
Assisting with academic writing	10.36%	37
Referencing Support	12.04%	43
Exam support	3.08%	11
Total		357

Question 12 asked participants, if they were referred to the ASO, who referred them and this included self-referral. As a result of never being referred to the ASO, 65% of respondents chose the "not applicable" response. Academic staff referred 18.5%, followed by self referral at 9.1%. The PELA is administered to all enrolled students in semester one as a diagnostic tool to identify students who may need academic support and 2.75% of respondents were referred via this avenue. The Disability and Equity Support Office referred 3.0% of respondents to the ASO and the smallest number of referrals came from non-academic staff (.8%).

Question 13 asked the reason for the ASO referral. Of the 366 participants, 90 skipped this question with a large percentage of the remaining participants (75%) responding with a "not applicable" response. In descending order, omitting the "not applicable" responses, the main reasons for student referrals include: academic writing (55%), disability issues (14%),

pathways support (10%), PELA referrals (7%), mathematics referrals (6%), self-referral as a result of general ASO advertising (5%), and referencing (3%).

A further 4% of respondents referred themselves to the ASO as a specific result of email reminders advertising ASO services. Table 4.3 below shows a breakdown of respondent reasons for referral to ASO services. The left hand table shows the data calculations including the "not-applicable" responses as well as the number and percentage of respondents in the second and third column respectively. The right hand table omits the "not applicable" responses from data calculations and also shows the number and percentage of respondents in the second and third column respectively.

Table 4. 3 Student reasons for referral to ASO services, question 13.

Reason for referral	Number	Percentage		Reason for referral	Number	Percentage
NA	207	75%		Academic Writing	38	55%
Academic Writing	38	14%		Disability	10	14%
Disability	10	4%		Pathways	7	10%
Pathways	7	3%		PELA	5	7%
PELA	5	2%		Maths	4	6%
Maths	4	1%		ASO Advertising	3	4%
ASO Advertising	3	1%		Referencing	2	3%
Referencing	2	1%		Grand Total	69	100%
Grand Total	276	100%				

Question 14 asked participants, if they needed academic assistance with the ASO, why they did not seek this help. This question provided a "not applicable" option for students who did not need to access ASO services. Of the 366 participants, 283 responded to this question; and of these, 70% of respondents chose the "not applicable" option. From the remaining respondents, 39% identified fear of stigma as their reason for not accesssing sevices; the next category chosen was related to time management issues (26%), followed by a lack of ASO information (22%) and lastly, lack of motivation (13%).

See Table 4.4 below for results of why participants did not seek help from ASO when they required support with "not applicable" responses included in the categories in column one in the left hand table, and number of respondents and percentages in the second and third column respectively. In the table on the right hand side, the results are calculated without the "not applicable" responses included in the categories in column one. The total number of respondents and percentages are shown in column two and three respectively.

Table 4. 4 Student reasons for not seeking help with the ASO if they required academic assistance, question 14.

Categories	Number	Percent		Categories	Number	Percent
NA	198	70%		Stigma	33	39%
Stigma	33	12%		Time Management	22	26%
Time Management	22	8%		Lack of ASO info	19	22%
Lack of ASO info	19	7%		Motivation	11	13%
Motivation	11	4%		Grand Total	85	100%
Grand Total	283	100%				

To gauge the ease of access to ASO services, as this may be an indication of an obstacle to accessing ASO services, question 15 asked how easy students found it to access ASO services at UNDA. This question was skipped by only four students and was based on a five point level of difficulty likert scale with an additional selection of "not applicable/never accessed" response. The most common response was moderately easy (30.1%), followed by "not applicable/never accessed" (26.5%), followed by very easy (26.2%), neither easy or difficult (12.7%) and finally, moderately difficult (4.1%) and very difficult (.3%).

This study further investigated (question 16) how satisfied participants were with their ASO experience. Of the respondents, 63.8% had never accessed ASO services and of the remaining respondents, 34.8% were satisfied and 1.4% were not.

Where questions in this survey provided respondents with the opportunity for open responses, thematic text analysis was undertaken. In this instance it provided information on why or why not students were satisfied with ASO services. There were 130 responses to this second part of the question. For the majority of respondents, this question was identified as "not applicable" (66.2%). Themes relevant to student satisfaction with ASO services included staff excellence (26.9%) and easy access to ASO services (4.6%). Three respondents (2.3%) indicated that they were not satisfied with ASO services. Their reasons were: …

- They have not maintained their standard of helping students when they ask for it
- Out of reach
- Because there was not specific study tips that the staff member could give me.

4.1.3 Respondent Suggestions to Increase ASO Access

Question 17 was answered by all participants (366) in the study, however, 20.2% of this total responded with a "not applicable" response, highlighted in yellow in Table 4.5 below, despite this not being listed as an option for this question. The question asked respondents to list one way the ASO could encourage students to access their services. Analysis of the responses were collated into 14 themes. Excluding "not applicable" responses, the suggestion from students that received the highest response was more advertising of ASO services information (25.7%). The next category was the suggestion for ASO staff to visit students in lectures or tutorials to advertise ASO services (13.9%); followed by more ASO emails (12%) to students advertising ASO services. Specific advertising suggestions from respondents included: available hard copies of ASO information; noticeboard advertising; hosting events in the courtyard; more posters around the university; blackboard advertising; and academics promoting ASO services in lectures and tutorials.

Table 4.5 below shows suggestions from respondents to encourage students to access ASO services in the left hand column and in the right hand column the number of respondents and percentage of respondents.

Table 4. 5 Student suggestions for ways to encourage access to ASO services

Suggestions to encourage ASO access (themes) ▾	Total	Percent
ASO information advertising	94	25.7%
N/A	74	20.2%
classroom visits from ASO	51	13.9%
More emails from ASO	44	12.0%
More ASO staff needed	19	5.2%
Workshop suggestions - type and frequency	16	4.4%
Food bribe as incentive to access ASO	13	3.6%
Reduce perceived stigma associated with ASO	13	3.6%
More online support	11	3.0%
Mandatory support sessions	8	2.2%
Social media should advertise ASO Services	7	1.9%
Current ASO methods satisfactory	6	1.6%
ASO testimonials from students	5	1.4%
More library services	4	1.1%
Embed support in units	1	0.3%
Grand Total	366	100.0%

Question 18 sought to identify student perceptions of how participants would feel if they accessed ASO services and to classify these responses in relation to the potential stigma, at times, associated with support services. This question asked how would/does accessing ASO service make you feel and why? A total of 230 participants answered this question. Once the "not-applicable" responses were removed, most respondents (73%) revealed that there was no stigma attached to accessing ASO services and 22% of respondents believed there was stigma attached to accessing ASO services. The remainder of respondents (5%) believed the experience of accessing ASO services would be a positive experience but they did not require the services.

4.1.4 Results of PELA Questions

Questions 19, 20 and 21 related to the PELA, a diagnostic tool administered to all enrolled students in the first weeks of their first semester at university. Question 19 and 20 required a yes or no response to determine if participants achieved benchmark for reading and writing in the PELA. The percentage of students that achieved benchmark in reading was 87.1% and below benchmark was 12.9%. This question was answered by 310 respondents. Participants who achieved benchmark in writing was 84.1% and below benchmark, 15.9%. This question was answered by 308 respondents.

Question 21 asked participants, if they were below benchmark in their PELA result in either reading or writing, did they access the recommended ASO support? Further information was required for this question about why or why not? This question also had an option to list "not applicable", passed PELA, as a selection and 19.5% of students selected this option. The total percentage of respondents below benchmark in PELA not accessing the recommended ASO support was 64.8% and the total for respondents that did access support when recommended was 16.2%.

Respondents that commented on why or why not they accessed recommended support was as follows: "not applicable"(44.9%); ASO services not required because PELA benchmark was achieved (15.9%); no knowledge of PELA (8.7%); did not complete PELA due to anxiety related reasons (4.35%); respondents were unaware of the physical location of ASO services (7.3%); respondents did not feel like they had enough time to access ASO services (4.4%); and (1.5%) found the email notifying students of below benchmark status and the recommendation to access ASO services to be disconcerting.

The reasons students cited for accessing ASO services when recommended was due to the need for further support with developing academic skills (10.1%); supportive ASO staff (1.5%); and encouragment from academic staff (1.5%).

4.1.5 Results of Respondent Suggestions for a Smoother Transition

Question 22 gave participants the opportunity to reflect and suggest any type of support or help that would have assisted a smoother transition in their first year into higher education. There were 236 responses to this question from which 20% responded with "not applicable".

The key recommendations cited in 80% of responses were suggestions that ASO services include those services already provided by ASO services. Table 4.6 below details the themes of the responses provided by respondents. Respondent suggestions already provided by ASO, have been coded as Current ASO Services. Transition strategies was the second highest suggestion from respondents (17%) and University procedures was the final suggestion (3%) to assist a smooth transition. The left hand side of the table lists themes of participant responses and the number and percentage of students including those participants that selected a "non-applicable" response. The right hand side of the table supplies the same information without the "non-applicable" responses.

Table 4. 6 Student suggestions for a smoother transition in first year, question 22.

Themes Include NA	Sum	Percentage		Themes Exclude NA	Sum	Percentage
Current ASO services	152	64%		Current ASO services	152	80%
NA	47	20%		Transition strategies	32	17%
Transition strategies	32	14%		University Procedures	5	3%
University Procedures	5	2%		Grand Total	189	100%
Grand Total	236	100%				

Shown below in Table 4.7 are examples of ASO services suggested by respondents that are already in place at UNDA for a smoother transition into first years at university.

Table 4. 7 Examples of respondent suggestions for ASO services already provided at UNDA

Help with procrastination after coming our of a 3 month break after high school.
Help with referencing
How to start writing an essay and assist in helping
Referencing and stress.
Referencing style, time management
Having more help and how it works etc
More resources
Assistance in referencing and writing
Study help and how to study properly.
help with assessment starting
Referencing help.
How to approach university assessment and what is expected for first year
Referencing support
Study help and how to properly study without distractions.
Regular checking of assignments to see if they are right.

Shown in Table 4.8 below are examples of suggestions for transition strategies provided by respondents to assist in a smoother transition into first year university.

Table 4. 8 Examples of respondent suggestions for transition strategies.

Transition into uni
A "FIRST YEARS" week prior to the beginning of uni, so we can find all our classes look at how the unit outlines work.
What is expected of a uni student and how to balance work and university.
I am a mature aged student and the combination of my age and the foundation year made my transition quite smooth
Assessment run throughs
To ease into university better, the transition from year 12 to first year at university was very hard. Feels like you have missed a year of studies.
Small talk conventions with first year students
Buddy program- assign a higher year level student to assist first year students.
Having a mentor
I think blackboard announcements/ materials become too much too quickly. I may get up to 50 notifications per day and this is a major stress problem for me. Refining University documents and materials online would help many students.
A class on transitioning to university from high school covering how to study and understand university classes and procedures
Talks from current students at the open days
having compulsory workshops for first years
the peer buddy for first years
Clearer explanations of what is included in semester. Reminders.

University procedures was a theme identified, by some respondents, as a category to review to assist with a smoother transition into first year of university study, suggestions are detailed in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4. 9 Examples of respondent suggestions for a smoother transition by reviewing university procedures.

A better appeals system - medical reasons need to be re evaluated
A better timetable system needs to be devised by the university
Counselling service increased
Assistance for people who are carers of siblings who are disabled, they are disadvantaged.
More financial help.

4.1.6 Results of Respondents' Preferred Topics for Workshop Presentations

Question 23 asked students to suggest preferred topics to include in the ASO workshops and participants could choose more than one answer for this question. Essay skills had the highest request (59.0%), followed by academic writing skills (49.2%), followed by exam preparation (41.0%), and closely followed by time management (40.2%).

Following in descending order are the remaining topics requested for ASO workshops: research skills, stress management, analysing assignment tasks, improving your memory, critical thinking, creating an essay argument, mathematical skills, reading skills, assistance with procrastination, strategies to assist distraction and lastly academic resilience. Table 4.10 below shows the list of topic workshops in column one and the number of participants and percentage of participants that selected these topics in column two and three, respectively.

Table 4. 10 Preferred topics students would like included in Academic (Study Skill) Workshops

Answer Choices	Responses	
Essay skills	59.02%	216
Writing skills	49.18%	180
Exam Preparation	40.98%	150
Time Management	40.16%	147
Research skills	36.07%	132
Stress Management	35.79%	131
Analysing Assignment tasks	32.79%	120
Improving your Memory	32.51%	119
Critical Thinking	31.97%	117
Creating an Essay Argument	31.42%	115
Mathematic skills	18.85%	69
Reading skills	11.20%	41
Assistance with procrastination	6.28%	23
Strategies to assist distraction	4.92%	18
Academic Resilience	2.46%	9
Referencing support	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 366		

4.1.7 Results of Respondents Academic Achievement

Question 24, the final question, asked students about their academic achievement in semester one and the selection of three options was given; passed all units, failed one unit or failed more than one unit. A total of 316 respondents answered this question. The highest response (83.2%) was for students passing all units, followed by students failing one unit (12.3%) and lastly, students failing more than one unit (4.4%).

The closed and open-ended questions in this survey guided the questions for the group and individual interviews. Expanding on the yes/no responses provided in the surveys, the

interviews enabled the probing for possible reasons for responses and this was particularly useful when participants were asked questions regarding awareness and knowledge of ASO services. The open-ended questions relating to transition led to more detailed questions on preparation and expectations of participants for higher education.

4.2 Presentation of Data from Interview questions 1 – 10.

In this study, students participated by completing the survey and were subsequently invited to participate in group or individual interviews to provide more in-depth information. Eight participants were interviewed before data saturation was achieved. Four interviews were conducted: one with four participants, and one with two participants. This breakdown was purely because of student availability. Two students preferred to take part in individual interviews.

4.2.1 Interview Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and analysed as described in chapter three. Data were analysed using thematic coding of interview transcripts: first the transcripts of the interviews were read to discover emergent categories and themes. Those initial clusters provided the broad view and the subsequent line-by-line coding allowing for higher and higher levels of abstraction to be reached.

The unit of analysis was the sentence. Line-by-line coding was then followed by identification of pertinent text. This was then summarised and linked to the categories and themes as these developed. A detailed example is provided below for question one of the interview questions showing how themes were identified by category for each question in each interview.

4.2.2 Interview Question 1

How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?

Prompt questions

- What did you expect University to be like?

- What would have helped you transition better to tertiary education in those first few

  weeks?

Table 4. 11 Question one: Sentence analysis data for four participants in interview one.

Interview 1 (Four participants) 1. How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?			
TEXT	**SUMMARY**	**CATEGORY**	**THEME**
I was not very prepared, I applied less than a week before starting, and I felt unprepared with resources.	Pressure of timing caused lack of preparedness	Transition	Preparedness due to lack of resources
I think I had a text book, I mean I didn't have my text books. I probably had pen and paper.	Lack of resources contributed to feeling unprepared.	Transition	Preparedness due to lack of resources
I was so anxious like I , like I know I had the capability to do it but I didn't feel prepared, I think because I didn't know what to expect.	Student felt anxious due to not knowing what to expect.	Transition	Preparedness due to expectations

Anxiety about new expectations |
| I felt anxious too because in high school they build up university so big in your head and I hadn't been studying for five years so it was really daunting and confronting. | High school gave the impression university was an overwhelming experience, this caused anxiety. | Transition | Preparedness – lack of high school preparation

Anxiety about higher education |
| On a scale on 1-10, probably 7, because I already knew people in the university so they just helped me out to get by so they would just tell me do this, do that and that's how I know a lot of things already. | Students are less anxious when they know other students. | Transition | Prepared due to social support |

Well, I was prepared and I had a laptop and I actually applied early for this.	Felt prepared because of early application and resources.	Transition	Preparedness with early application and resources
I think I had the pros and cons, like I definitely thought I was going to be at university Monday to Friday full time hours and then I realised just a couple of hours here and there and I was shocked that I could actually work all days and I could actually balance out my life and live a pretty fairly normal life.	Students can maintain balance in life while at university due to timetabling of units.	Transition	Expectations of higher education. Balance is achievable with time management
See I had four days last semester with an hour here and there but I had the opposite experience like, oh my God I can actually do this and I had so much support that I was like hang on a minute, this isn't anything.	Students can maintain balance in life while at university due to timetabling of units	Transition	Balance is achievable while studying.
It was just such a welcoming environment whereas I thought, obviously university is about learning but I think going to the foundation year because I was an anxious person, was the best thing for me because even though I had the skills I just needed someone to reinforce the fact that I could do it,	Enrolling in foundation studies assists in preparing students for higher education.	Transition	Foundation year courses prepare students for study
I was expecting it to be extremely full on and I was expecting it to be boring and hard and tedious but it has actually been surprisingly more enjoyable, but I mean assignments will always suck.	Expectations of higher education not as overwhelming, more pleasant and achievable.	Transition	Expectations of higher education.
Teachers really helped in those first few weeks.	Staff supportive at ND	Transition	Teachers are helpful and supportive
Like getting feedback is one thing, like my main advice from my mum was get to know your teachers, don't feel	Feedback helpful but advice from mum about the benefits about getting to know teachers invaluable.	Transition	Feedback helpful for successful transition Support from family

uncomfortable, approach them it's really going to benefit you, and that's something that's 100% benefit.			
Like even just going up to a teacher and just introducing myself, making them aware of you like that helped so much because they were so much more willing to help you and that was definitely something I needed.	Willingness of teachers to support students is appreciated.	Transition	Teachers are helpful and supportive.
I got the feedback that I needed, I think having feedback and knowing that I made the right decision and that I'm on track was crucial, not really much else mattered.	Feedback was paramount to my academic confidence.	Transition	Staff support with academic decisions.
Like I made friends eventually but for me just to know I had made the right decision that was probably the most important thing.	Making good decisions was more important than making friends.	Transition	Staff support with academic decisions
And I think they eased us into it, like in terms of all the subjects were structured really well.	The course is structured well for transition.	Transition	Scaffolding of units assists first year students
I think the only thing was maybe like they did say at the start, like go see … (ASO staff member) and they did say it but there wasn't the emphasis on it.	There should be more emphasis on accessing ASO services early.	Student suggestion	Access ASO services
And I always thought I will have to email her and I will have to wait a few weeks whereas when I eventually , hang on a minute I will and see … (ASO staff member) she emailed me straight back and I saw her the next day and that's not explained in the first few weeks and it should be.	Accessing ASO services was easier than expected and should be explained in the first few weeks.	Student suggestion	Access ASO services
I had to get an LAP (Learning Access Plan) and I think I waited like a	Accessing ASO services was easier than expected	Student suggestion	Access ASO services

few months to get info on it, so there was that idea that if you needed help you would have to go through this massive process where I think if they explained that a bit better in the first few weeks we probably would have got it earlier.	and should be explained in the first few weeks.		
Like I didn't actually see … (ASO staff member) until the second semester and then I was like, "Dammit, I wish I had seen her for the other assessments".	Students felt regret about not accessing ASO services earlier.	Transition	Access ASO services

Table 4. 12 Summary of category and thematic analysis for four participants in interview one.

Transition
- Preparedness
    - Lack of resources
    - Lack of high school preparation
    - Social support
    - Foundation year course
    - Lack of mid-year orientation
- Anxiety
    - New expectations
- Balance achievable while at university
- Staff support
    - Helpful and approachable
    - Feedback useful
    - Scaffolding of units useful
    - Support with academic decisions

Student suggestions
- Access ASO services
    - Access earlier
    - Accessing easy

Table 4. 13 Question one: Sentence analysis data for two participants in interview two.

TEXT	SUMMARY	CATEGORY	THEME
Interview 2 (Two participants)			
1. How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?			
I guess fairly prepared, due to my school really drumming it into us that we had to do mandatory careers classes in year 10 so when we went through UAC and universities and what to expect.	Students feel prepared due to school preparation	Transition	Prepared due to high school support
I was not prepared because I am a mature age student and have not studied for over 20 years.	Lack of preparedness due to mature age status.	Transition	Unprepared due to mature age status.
It's been a huge learning curve.	Higher education is difficult.	Transition	Time is needed to develop academic skills.
I thought I was prepared but really, it was fortunate that I am quite good with IT, you know, I've got really good systems at home so I was all set up with printers and all that stuff but it's been – the biggest challenge for me has been learning to write academically.	Felt prepared due to IT skills although academic writing was still challenge.	Transition	Prepared due to IT experience/skills.
And then coming at mid-year with orientation it's sort of been left to your own devices to find information like, should I continue?	Lack of mid-year orientation has caused lack of preparedness	Transition	Orientation for mid-year intake students
I have absolutely no academic writing experience.	Lack of writing experience	Transition	Unprepared due to mature age status.
So it was really, I've loved it but it's been really difficult to know what to do next.	Higher education has been enjoyable but difficult	Transition	Expectations of higher education
Your website assisted and ASO helped enormously.	ASO services were helpful	Transition	ASO services supportive
It took a lot of reading and then Blackboard! There was one paragraph about Blackboard, I needed more and I was	It took time to understand Blackboard	Student suggestion	More Learning Management System (Blackboard) support

thinking what am I supposed to do here, it didn't really make sense, maybe because I haven't been to university.			
I was fortunate I had the experience with portals with the platforms but even then I was, you know, unsure, so I went to see … (IT Help desk) to set up my IT, it was fantastic.	Previous experience with educational platforms assists students.	Transition	Prepared due to IT experience/skills
So I got there in the end but I felt not having mid-year orientation especially for a mature aged student was really quite challenging	Lack of mid-year orientation was challenging	Student suggestion	Orientation for mid-year intake students.
I am a great little researcher and that's how I found you and booked an appointment before starting uni.	Researching university services is helpful	Transition	Research skills helpful
It was helpful since I didn't feel like there was much support for mid-year intake.	There was no mid-year support for mid-year intake.	Student suggestions	Orientation for mid-year intake students.
Well I've been waiting to come here since June and I applied in January, February, something like that.	Preparedness due to early application.	Transition	Preparedness due to early application
So I did a lot of research on the university and what they offered.	Research enables students to find out about services.	Transition	Access to all support services due to research.
Uni is a lot more independent because you know how with high school they really push you and say this is what we want, this is how you answer the question, have you done your homework, "Oh you haven't done your homework?".	University is more independent learning than school.	Transition	Expectations - Independent learning
Back when we had careers they really did basically push that it would be more independent, you know, you have to do your own work.	Careers at schools assisted in understanding about independent learning at uni.	Transition	Prepared due to high school support.

I operate better with face to face then online.	Face to face teaching is more effective	Transition	Objects of the University Face-to-face teaching supports learning
It's exceeded my expectations probably with the smaller classes, you know, it's personalised you really do deliver what you say in your mission statement, yeah!	Expectations of university has been exceeded with ND personalised philosophy.	Transition	Objectives of the university - personalised
Yeah I would have liked a one day orientation for part timers, to congratulate you before you start, congratulations your part of this and then this is what you need to do or even half day.	Orientation for part time students would be helpful.	Student suggestion	Orientation for part time students.

Table 4. 14 Summary of category and thematic analysis for two participants in interview two.

Transition
- Preparedness
  - Prepared through high school support
  - Early application
  - Good IT/research skills
  - Unprepared mature age
  - Expectations of Higher Education
  - Lack of mid-year orientation/for part-time students
  - Time needed to develop skills
- ASO services supportive
  - Easy to access info on support services
- Expectations
  - Independent learning

Student suggestions
- More IT support

Objects of the University
- Personalised support
- Face-to-face helpful

Table 4. 15 Question one: Sentence analysis data for one participant in interview three.

Interview 3 (One participant)			
1. How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?			
TEXT	**SUMMARY**	**CATEGORY**	**THEME**
I was not very prepared, because I am coming back to study from many years away and lacked confidence in myself and my skills.	Not prepared due to lack of confidence after a long break in education.	Transition	Broken education creates anxiety.
When you've been away for – you know I've been out of high school since 1982 – Many things have changed.	Education has changed since 1982.	Transition	Broken education creates anxiety.
A lot of the way that they do things, a lot of the way assignments are submitted, how everything is done by technology instead of paper-based, that's all changed drastically.	Technology has changed education and how assignments are submitted.	Transition	Lack of IT skills
I wasn't surprised about the expectation of uni, but it just takes a bit to get up to speed with how things are done now.	No surprises with expectations of higher education	Transition	Expectations of higher education.
Making sure that you understand the processes, you know where to find everything, how things are submitted when you have to submit assignments you're looking at the website going "Oh my God, I know it's in here somewhere because it is different".	Understanding how to submit assignments is essential.	Transition	Expectations of good IT skills.
A lot of people feel like they'll be the only one and they also feel like that they don't want to feel like they're asking silly questions.	Perceived stigma can affect academic progress.	Stigma	Uncomfortable about asking questions.

Table 4. 16 Summary of category and thematic analysis for one participant in interview three

Transition

• Anxiety
    o Break in education/study
    o New expectations
• Preparedness
    o Lack of IT skills
• Stigma
    o Uncomfortable about asking questions.

Table 4. 17 Question one: Sentence analysis data for one participants in interview four.

Interview 4 (One participant)			
1. How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?			
TEXT	SUMMARY	CATEGORY	THEME
I felt pretty prepared in terms of the expectations of like referencing and that kind of thing and writing essays and also independent study.	I felt prepared with academic expectations and independent study	Transition	Prepared with academic skills.
I mean I'd taken an extra year to do my HSC so my second year I was kind of pretty much on my own anyway –	An extra year for HSC increased independent study habits.	Transition	Prepared with independent learning/study
So I learned how to, you know independently study and reference.	Skills in independent study and referencing	Transition	Prepared with independent learning/study
I mean from what I'd heard of Notre Dame like it seemed to fit me, you know you are actually a person, you're not a number.	Notre Dame was a good fit for me since you were treated as an individual.	Transition	Objectives of the University

Table 4. 18 Summary of category and thematic analysis for one participant for interview four.

Transition

• Preparedness
    o Good academic skills
• Expectations
    o Good at independent learning
• Objects of the University
    o Treated as individual

Table 4. 19 Question one: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Transition
- Preparedness
  - Lack of resources
  - Expectations
  - Lack of high school preparation
  - Lack of mid-year/part-time student orientation
  - Social support
  - Early application and resources
  - Foundation year courses prepare students for study
  - Time needed to develop skills
  - Good high school support
  - Access to ASO services easy and useful
  - IT and research experience/skills
  - Mature age felt unprepared
  - Experience in research skills
  - Early application felt prepared
  - Good independent learning/study skills
  - Good academic skills
- Anxiety about;
  - New expectations
  - Higher education
  - Social connections
  - Lack of skills
  - Changes in education
  - Broken education
- Expectations of;
  - Higher education
  - Good at independent learning
- Balance is achievable
  - With time management
  - While studying

- Teachers are helpful and supportive and
  - assist with academic decisions
  - provide feedback for successful transition
  - scaffold units to assist first year students.
- ASO services
  - Access earlier
  - Accessing easy
- Support from family
- Time is needed to develop academic skills.
- Objectives of the university
  - Personalised support
  - Treated as individual
  - Face-to-face delivery helpful

Stigma
- Uncomfortable about asking questions

Student suggestions
- Access ASO services
- Orientation
  - mid-year intake students
  - part-time students
- More Learning Management System (Blackboard) /IT support

The sentence analysis data and summary of analysis for categories and thematic analysis conducted for question one above was conducted for all interview questions. Please find following the summary collation of this data for the remaining nine interview questions.

4.2.3 Interview Question 2

According to the survey results a large number of students (77%) are aware of the Academic (Study Skills) Workshops at lunch time but the survey data shows a lack of attendance. Can you suggest reasons why?

Prompt questions.

- Why is it the case that students are asking for support on workshop topics but not coming to workshops?

- Can you suggest ways to increase attendance at workshops?

Table 4. 20 Question two: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Dissemination of information
 • Marketing
     ○ ASO services information
     ○ ASO staff visiting classrooms to advertise services
     ○ Academics promoting ASO services in class
     ○ Lack of information is an obstacle to accessing ASO services
Stigma
 • Obstacle to accessing support
 • Anxiety about what others might think.
Transition
 • Incentives such as rewards, certificate or food for accessing ASO services.
 • Lack of motivation to give up lunch hour.
 • Priorities
 • Students may not require support

4.2.4 Interview Question 3

Survey results indicate students are not as aware of the Mathematic Workshops as compared to the Academic (Study Skills) Workshops (50%). Why, when both workshops are advertised in the same way?

Prompt Questions

- How could the Mathematic Workshops be more accessible to students needing numeracy assistance?

- What format would be most helpful for the Mathematic Workshops?

  Format examples may include general topics, course specific maths, drop-in sessions or individual appointments?

Table 4. 21 Question three: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Dissemination of information
• Marketing
      o ASO services
      o Academics promoting ASO services in class
      o Social media advertising
• Mathematics workshops not noticed by students if not required
 	
Transition
• Embedded academic skills in a unit
• Access to ASO services
 	
Student Suggestions
• Variety of formats required for Mathematics workshops
• No activities in workshops
• Increase student connection

4.2.5 Interview Question 4

What services do you think ASO mostly assist students with?

Prompt Questions

- What do students mostly need help with? (58% listed essay support).

- What do they need the least help with?

Table 4. 22 Question four: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Transition
- Research and essay work
- Research, writing and referencing.
- IT support

Student suggestions
- Increase School support for academic issues (referencing and writing).
- Access ASO services
- Teacher feedback supports first year students.

</div>

4.2.6 Interview Question 5

If students were struggling and did not seek support, why?

Table 4. 23 Question five: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Dissemination of information
- Marketing
  - ASO services
  - Ease of access to support services

Transition
- Orientation programs to include mandatory support sessions
  - Assistance with goal setting
  - Assistance with planning career support
  - Improve time management

- Internal factors
  - Lack of Motivation
  - Assistance with procrastination
  - Laziness

- Accessing ASO services is easy
- Increase incentives
  - Awards, food

Stigma
- Embarrassed to access support.
- Inability to seek help
  - Perceived obstacle to accessing support

</div>

4.2.7 Interview Question 6

To what extent are the Notre Dame emails effective reminders of ASO services?

Prompt questions.

- Do you delete the ASO adverts or do you genuinely peruse the topics to see if any may be

    of interest?

- Do you believe social media would be a good form of advertising for ASO services?

Table 4. 24 Question six: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Dissemination of information
- Marketing
    - ASO services
    - Academics promoting ASO services
    - Lack of information is an obstacle to accessing ASO

- Awareness of missing information.
- Not all students require ASO services

Transition
- Orientation programs to include mandatory support sessions
- IT support required
- Access to ASO services.
- Past experiences can determine current attitudes to support

4.2.8 Interview Question 7

Do you know what PELA is?

Prompt questions

- The PELA question was skipped by 187 students (out of 366), do you have any

    suggestions why?

- If benchmark was not reached on PELA, students were advised to contact the ASO for academic assistance. According to the survey results students did not contact the ASO for support, can you suggestions reasons why?

Table 4. 25 Question seven: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

---

Transition
- ASO services
  - Awareness of support
  - Delayed access to ASO services unhelpful
  - Students misunderstand diagnostic support (PELA)
- Teacher feedback supports first year students

Stigma
- Obstacle to accessing support
  - Embarrassed to access support
  - Students not aware of their academic capabilities
  - Anxiety associated with results.

Dissemination of information
- Marketing
  - ASO services
  - Other support services/networks

4.2.9 Interview Question 8

Looking back since you first started university at the beginning of 2015, what areas did you struggle most with? Either academic or non-academic.

Table 4. 26 Question 8: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

---

Transition
- Expectations
  - Independent learning
  - Adapting to a tertiary level standard of work
  - Prior experience can determine current attitudes
  - Teacher feedback
  - Time management
- Practical obstacles hinder transition success
- IT support
- Social connections
- Support for LOGOS
- Accessing ASO services

4.2.10 Interview Question 9

Moving forward and putting initiatives/strategies in place in the future to assist first year students with academic support, what ideas can you suggest? Some ideas include the following:

Prompt questions

- Peer mentoring programs

- Embedding PELA in core literacy units

- Embedding specific academic skills such as essay writing and referencing skills into core units in your course.

- Formalising regulations within the university to ensure that students who have failed a unit/s must access ASO services?

Table 4. 27 Question nine: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Student suggestions
- Peer mentoring
- More mathematics workshops for nursing
- Embedding of academic skills in units.
- Central management system (CMS) to target struggling students
- Marketing
  - ASO staff visiting classrooms to advertise services
  - Personalise ASO advertising to include photos of staff.
- Orientation programs
  - include mandatory support sessions
  - mid-year intake orientation
  - more orientation involvement from ASO staff
- Anxiety
  - new expectations

- Increased access to ASO services
- Online assistance
  - ASO online forum
  - ASO online support

Transition
- To ease transition
  - Early access to ASO services
  - Social connections
  - Teacher feedback

- Anxiety associated with new expectations

Dissemination of information
- Marketing
  - ASO services
  - Other support services/networks
  - Activities on campus
  - Lack of information is an obstacle to accessing ASO

4.2.11 Interview Question 10

What is Notre Dame doing well to support students?

Prompt question

- What makes you connect to this institution?

Table 4. 28 Question ten: Collated summary of categories and thematic analysis

Transition
- Embedding academic skills in units to assist transition
- Access to ASO services
- Objectives of the University are achieved (unique context at Notre Dame)
  - Logos program
  - Pastoral care is high
  - Notre Dame has a caring and supportive environment.
  - My experience at Notre Dame is better than other educational experiences
  - Smaller class numbers creates a more intimate environment
  - Students feel important and valued due to small class sizes
- Teachers and staff
  - are helpful and supportive
  - are attentive to students
  - are approachable
  - are friendly
  - create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere
  - enable students to access them easily
  - support learning in a relaxed environment
  - are happy to explain relevance of content and units

- Professional development for future career
- Transition strategies
  - Orientation programs catered for School of Nursing
  - Teacher feedback supports first year students
  - Peer review strategies

Dissemination of information
- Marketing
  - accessing ASO services.
  - reputation of Notre Dame

Student suggestion
- Student testimonials
- Embed academic skills in more units.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in chapter four and relates them to the literature and research described in chapter two. The discussion is presented under the research questions to provide an answer to them.

The first research question was: What factors enable or inhibit student access to ASO services?

The second was: How can UNDA better assist students transitioning into first year?

The third was: What suggestions do students provide that will enhance access (earlier access) to ASO services?

5.2 Research Question One: What factors enable or inhibit student access to ASO services?

This section discusses participant responses to the question identifying enablers and inhibitors that influenced student decisions to access ASO services within UNDA, Sydney. For this research question to be answered, the discussion is divided into two sections: factors that enabled student access to ASO services; and factors that inhibited student access to ASO services.

5.2.1 Factors that Enable Student to Access to ASO Services

There are several findings to take into account with this study and how these results assist in understanding the needs of UNDA students and how this might impact on student decisions to access ASO services. When the question was asked in the survey about academic performance, 83.2% of all participants had passed all their units of study. If such a large

portion of students passed all units then the necessity for these students to access academic support is less critical.

The factors identified in the findings that enabled students to access ASO services include, firstly, the Objects of the University, secondly, the commitment and collaboration of staff; thirdly, the type of ASO services offered, and, finally, the current support strategies currently in place at UNDA.

5.2.1.1 Objects of the University

The Objects of the University are:

a. the provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values; and

b. the provision of an excellent standard of –

    i.   teaching, scholarship and research;

    ii. training for the professions; and

    iii. Pastoral care for its students.

UNDA is a distinctive national Catholic university and staff are committed to pursuing its Objects. Specifically in relation to the current study, provision of an excellent standard of pastoral care, was a significant influence. Pastoral care at UNDA is appreciated and noticed by students and is crucial in guiding the philosophy of student support and well-being. According to student responses in both the survey and the interviews "pastoral care is high". Other examples of respondent comments include: "Pastoral care is excellent", "Teachers are so caring" and "No other university provides this type of pastoral care".

Committed to the provision of excellence in pastoral care, UNDA seeks to promote and enhance the wellbeing of each individual student. Higher education institutions are deeply concerned with the mental well-being of students (Gill et al., 2011). If students are ill-

equipped emotionally and psychologically to deal with the adjustment to university life then it is unlikely they will reach their academic potential and remain studying (Gill et al., 2011). UNDA promotes well-being through the provision of an integrative education, a personalised educational experience for every student, and a learning environment in which students are encouraged to grow and mature in all aspects of their development. Evidence of pastoral care at UNDA is apparent in the personalised approach to admissions, small class sizes, one-on-one contact with academic staff, individualised academic and counselling support programs, welcoming events, faith opportunities, and cultural and sporting events.

The idiosyncrasies of each higher education institutions is a central consideration when implementing structures of support. UNDA provides a caring and supportive environment where students feel valued and important, as the following response from a participant exemplifies, "I don't feel like a number here, I feel special". In addition, UNDA has maintained a reputation as one of the highest rated universities in Australia as determined in Government surveys (*cf.* (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching [QILT], 2015), and the *Good Universities Guide* (The Good Universities Guide, 2016). From these data, UNDA is rated five stars and first in NSW in the following key criteria: student support; teaching quality; skills development and overall educational experience. In relation to the current study, student satisfaction with student support corroborates the data on student academic performance. ASO services provide another dimension of the support available at UNDA due to the context of the University's priorities towards pastoral care and excellence in teaching. Participants noted that because they felt valued as individuals, and because they believed there was genuine concern for their wellbeing on the part of staff, they readily responded to advice from staff that they should access ASO services.

5.2.1.2 Commitment and collaboration of staff

Both survey and interview responses emphasised the qualities of the teaching staff at UNDA with comments such as;

Teachers are;

- helpful and supportive

- attentive

- approachable

- friendly

- good at creating create a comfortable learning environment

- helpful in providing pertinent feedback

- concerned about students professional development for future employment

- willing to assist when asked about relevance of content in units and courses.

Students are at the heart of UNDA and are supported by staff to discover and develop their gifts and talents. Participants reported that the support of academic staff meant there was less need to access ASO services as a first step as they were getting the just-in-time support they required from lecturers. Johnston (2011) emphasises the crucial role of teaching staff in the first year of study and the importance of staff availability to address the challenges associated with students transitioning to tertiary studies. Academic staff in this study were also quick to refer students in need of additional support and students found this an enabler. Additionally, participants noted that because of the sense of caring within all spheres of the university, those students who were struggling were also comfortable to self-refer.

5.2.1.3 Type of ASO services

Students who had accessed ASO services were satisfied with the experience, however, there was no separation in the findings of the satisfaction between the workshop attendance

and individual appointments. Findings in this study reinforce previous research (Brown et al., 2009) that show the development of academic skills, such as those presented in the ASO workshops, are mainly specific to first year students. Furthermore, individual appointments offer the opportunity for each student's specific needs to be catered for (Brown et al., 2009).

There were six key findings derived from the type of ASO services offered. The first finding related to appointments and the just-in-time support they offer by addressing contextual needs of the student (Brown et al., 2009). The data derived from this study identified how much the appointments were valued by attending students and how the individual appointments satisfied a range of issues. When students self-referred it meant that students had to determine in what areas they may need assistance and then be comfortable in seeking support and these were often already competent students according to the interview data in this study. Such structures of support do not always attract the students who are struggling academically (Lefroy et al., 2014). Accordingly, an important finding from the interview data was the fact that some students who had attended individual appointments accessed ASO services not for remedial support but, to achieve higher grades and improve the quality of their assignment work.

The second finding in this study identified two main reasons why students were satisfied with ASO services, firstly due to staff excellence and, secondly, due to the ease of access to ASO services. There was a small number of respondents (three) that were dissatisfied, these responses are listed in chapter four (*cf.*4.1.2). Once students had accessed ASO services, satisfaction with the effectiveness of the support was an enabler prompting the decision to return to ASO. Participants who had accessed ASO services and found it met their

needs, had spoken of this to peers and this word of mouth recommendation encouraged other students to also access ASO services.

5.2.1.4 Current support strategies

Participants in this study emphasised the importance of ASO services support early in their first year. The third finding in this study reinforced how essential it is for students to develop their academic literacy skills. ASO services provide support by catering to student needs in academic and information literacies via the optional Academic Skills workshops. Participants noted that this was helpful in the first year when students are unfamiliar with the academic skills required for tertiary studies.

In the workshops, ASO staff, in collaboration with library staff, have developed extra-curricular activities and resources in response to student needs relating to research skills in order to meet university expectations in their assignments. Following the work of Kokkin and Maher (2011), the workshops have been carefully scheduled to assist students with the skills required throughout the semester and have provided students with the understanding of the critical connection between research and writing assignments. These types of learning support models, were appreciated and noted by participants in this study, and have been successful in higher education institutions. This model of support share two components: an emphasis on specific skills development and meeting the timely needs of students in the first year of study by providing just-in-time support prior to assessment submission (Kokkin & Maher, 2011).

A fourth finding in this study identified as a supportive learning support was the discipline specific delivery of academic skills. The discipline specific workshops are presented by ASO staff during class time within School units. ASO staff work closely with academic staff and unit coordinators to deliver strategic and systematic support to first year

cohorts to maximise the impact of limited resources. This type of support more closely resembles generation three of the Transition Pedagogy theoretical framework (Kift, 2015). ASO staff have been providing this style of support in Nursing for three years in both literacy and mathematics. The close collaboration and nurturing of relationships with academic staff and staff in units underpin the success of program-based or embedded support for students (Kokkin & Maher, 2011) at UNDA.

A fifth finding in the data of this study identified ASO services, as a successful strategy for a smooth transition of commencing students, due to the partnerships and relationships between academic and professional staff (Hoyne & McNaught 2013). One respondent explains the support she has received from staff "as vital when I was sick, communication among staff relieved my stress because everyone knew what was going on". This sort of comprehensive support is made possible because of extensive academic staff interaction (*cf* 5.1.1.1) and ready referral to ASO services.

Another support strategy in place at UNDA is the PELA, a diagnostic assessment administered at the beginning of the semester to all new students. This assessment allows for the early identification and therefore early intervention shown to be so important to commencing students (Harris 2013). The six and final unexpected finding of the current study was a general negative reaction to PELA. Clearly, therefore, there is work to be done on the part of ASO in further explaining to students the purpose, importance and benefit of the PELA so that it is perceived as it is intended. Institutions should utilise their base of existing support practice to strengthen first year transition initiatives (Kift, 2008). Negative reactions from students surrounding a mandated PELA is unhelpful since an optional PELA would miss the students who might benefit the most (Ransom, 2009). The PELA, commonly used across

higher education institutions, serves the important purpose of identifying students' strengths and weaknesses (Dunworth, 2013; Read, 2015). At UNDA, when students fall below benchmark in their PELA results, they are contacted by the ASO via email and strongly recommended to attend the workshops or book an individual appointment to receive assistance with their academic skills. Participants who had responded to this had found the support defining in their later success.

Other support strategies identified by respondents that increased awareness and enabled access to ASO services include: specific orientation programs; teacher feedback on student work referring them to access additional support; and peer review strategies. The interview data indicates that, in each of these examples, ASO services were promoted as an academic support service.

5.2.2 Factors that Inhibit Student Access to ASO Services

This section discusses findings that were identified as inhibitors for student decisions to access ASO services. Three main findings dominated the results: the perception of stigma; the dissemination of information on ASO services; and time constraints.

5.2.2.1 Perception of Stigma

The perception of stigma was a factor to consider as an inhibitor for students accessing ASO services due to the remedial connotations associated with accessing support (Goldingay et al., 2014). First year students are experiencing independent study for the first time as adults and have the expectation that they should be able to manage without assistance; to seek support would be tantamount to acknowledging they cannot successfully perform in tertiary education. The survey explored this issue when participants were asked, if they needed academic assistance with the ASO, why they did not seek this help. The fear of stigma was

reported as the highest category as the reason for not accessing ASO services. The survey also attempted to identify the association between the perceptions of stigma and seeking support by asking participants to state how they would feel if they accessed ASO services. There was some contradictory data regarding this question. A significant proportion of respondents believed there was no stigma attached to seeking support, however, most of these students had not needed to access ASO support as they had passed all their units. Consequently, the responses denying any stigma associated with support services may not portray an accurate reflection of how a participant would actually feel if they found it necessary to access the services to support their studies. The remaining participants noted that their perception of stigma definitely affected their access to ASO services. Stigma was also mentioned in another survey question when participants were asked to suggest ways to encourage students to access ASO services and some respondents suggested reducing the stigma associated with accessing ASO services, although the method of how to do this was not detailed.

Furthermore, the interview data reinforced the theory that the perception of stigma does inhibit student access to ASO services. When participants were asked why they did not seek support when they knew they were struggling, responses reinforced the notion that the perceived stigma associated with support services had an impact on these participants. Comments such as, "embarrassed to access support", "inability to seek help", "anxiety related to accessing support", "anxiety about what others might think" and anxiety related to the perception of accessing remedial support, authenticated stigma as an obstacle to accessing ASO support.

As observed in the research of Goldingay et al., (2014) students in this study were sensitive to the idea that academic difficulties faced were viewed as requiring remedial

assistance not additional assistance. If some students have the impression that ASO services are only for remedial support, this is an inhibitor to students accessing ASO services.

5.2.2.2 Dissemination of Information on ASO Services

When students were asked in the survey and the interviews why they did not seek assistance if they needed it, a significant number of respondents believed it was due to a lack of information on ASO services. At UNDA information on ASO services is mostly disseminated to students via email and at events such as orientation and incursions in Schools at the beginning of the semester. Encouragement from academic staff and posters around the university also assist in conveying information to students about ASO services. According to respondents in the interview they estimated about two out of five teaching staff remind students about workshops and ASO services. A further finding related to information on ASO services was the complaints some respondents voiced in the survey and the interviews about the excessive logging on necessary to access the Learning Management System and University emails. This would indicate that accessing emails regularly for some students is challenging, therefore, contributing as an inhibitor to students accessing ASO services.

One important finding, that echoed those of Brown et al., (2009), was the fact that many students were extremely positive about ASO services but remained unaware about the details of the existence of the support and the location at UNDA. Support staff need to provide the appropriate services and ensure they communicate those services as early as possible to students to ensure students access them when required.

Of equal importance is to highlight the location of ASO services on campus. This is particularly important in universities that have multiple support locations such as UNDA where ASO services are situated on two campuses in Sydney.

5.2.2.3 Time Constraints

Time management was listed as an inhibitor for students accessing ASO services. When students were asked why they did not access ASO services if they required support, students blamed a lack of time and the inability to juggle multiple tasks as a reason. Living in Sydney is expensive and many students find themselves in the position where they have to work to support themselves and, consequently, end up studying full time and trying to work full time. The concern for these students as a worker and a scholar is the detrimental effect on their academic performance (Munro, 2011). Research from Monash university suggests that some students may not be serious scholars but with the current climate of enrolments in higher education, many of these students in that study are struggling against "the deprivation of poverty, tutor indifference, institutional marginalisation and lack of time" (Munro, 2011, p. 128). That study, further, highlighted that some students are faced with the prospect of continuing pressures to do more with less (Munro, 2011). Tutor indifference has not been a finding in this current study. In fact, the opposite was the case as evidence shows (*cf*. 5.1.1.2). Time commitments beyond study, however, was a significant inhibitor for participants in the current study in accessing ASO services.

5.3 Research Question Two: How can UNDA better assist students transitioning into first year?

5.3.1 Support within the Theoretical Framework

To assist with potential transition difficulties, support of new students in higher education is paramount to tertiary success (Kift, 2015). In the last ten years much of the literature on transitioning students to higher education has supported the effectiveness of a

centrally coordinated student support system that enables a university-wide early intervention

and an approach to target a range of available predictors of retention (Jackson & Read, 2012).

Universities have been slowly moving in the direction of generation three of Kift's Transition

Pedagogy theoretical framework as a result of evidenced based research findings over the last

decade. These detail the benefits of institution-wide initiatives to effectively support students

in their studies (Egea et al., 2014) rather than ad hoc, separate support systems. Consequently,

there appears to be a move away from generation one and two of Kift's Transition Pedagogy

model due to the lack of effectiveness of one-off isolated support initiatives (Kift, 2008;

Burnett & Larmar, 2011).

Conversely, within the theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy, the findings in

this study have identified generation one and two strategies as largely favourable and effective

strategies for the students at UNDA. Support practices sustained by individuals or small

groups of staff that are based outside of School curriculums, units and courses, continue to be

effective to the current needs of UNDA students. Major drivers for other universities to move

to generation three of Transition Pedagogy, include increased enrolment of students in online

courses, and increased enrolments of international students where there may be cultural

disjuncture between their expectations and the reality of study in Australia. Neither of these

drivers is relevant to UNDA. Additionally, UNDA students have a higher retention and

success rate than across the sector (Maher & Macallister, 2013; QILT, 2015). Participants cite

accessible academics providing a flexible and practical level of support, as important in their

success. Consequently, these factors have reduced the imperative to fully embrace generation

three and the practice of university-wide initiatives at UNDA. The suggestion to embed

academic skills university-wide in School units in this study received limited support: in the survey, one participant, and the interviews, three participants supported the idea.

5.3.1.1 Peer Mentoring Programs

Suggestions from the majority of respondents in this study have suggested peer mentoring as a key support strategy to assist in socialising and extending student support at UNDA. To position the suggestion of peer mentoring in relation to the literature and the four generations of the theoretical framework, it had its genesis in generation one and first gained attention in the year 2000. However, peer mentoring programs continue to be a staple in evidenced-based support strategies across all generations of Transition Pedagogy. Much of the literature already noted in chapter two of this study highlights the benefits of peer mentoring associated with students when a strong social network is in place and students subsequently, feel a sense of belonging to the institution, resulting in increased academic success and degree completion (Budgen et al., 2014; Morosanu et al., 2014). Other benefits associated with social support are networking, reduced stress, identity with the institution, early knowledge of resource information and improved retention (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). The practice of peer mentoring has evolved over time and become more sophisticated as student cohorts have diversified and as mobile technologies have become a part of everyday life.

5.3.1.2 Need for Improved Communication

The most surprising and significant finding identified when answering this research question were the suggestions made from 80% of respondents to provide the type of support that ASO services already provide! Some examples of these suggestions include; "more help with writing and referencing styles as uni classes not helped", "help procrastination", "help with organizational skills", "time management help", "how to start writing an essay",

"referencing help and stress", "study help and how to study properly", "help with starting an assessment", "study help and how to study without distractions", "regular checking of assignments to see if they are right" and, "one-on-one support". These type of examples were repeated continuously by respondents. All of these topics are covered in workshops offered by ASO services and are further supported by individual appointments with students when required. This finding strongly supports the earlier finding in this study (5.2.2.2) that dissemination of information relating to ASO services, acts as an inhibitor to student access.

5.3.1.3 Central Management System

Another suggestion made by participants to a smooth transition into tertiary education was the suggested implementation of a CMS to target potential struggling students. In the quest for early identification, some universities such as Western Sydney University and Griffith University have developed a CMS that flags potentially at-risk students (Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Lizzio & Wilson, 2013). Academically at-risk or struggling students who exhibit certain behaviours of disengagement from their studies are contacted as a result of: failure to submit an assignment; poor grades of first assignment; making extension requests; submitting assignments late; non-submission of assignments; and minimal use of the Learning Management System (Barnes et al., 2015; Jackson & Read, 2012). Flagging and contacting students in this way is the foundation of the success of a CMS program to support and retain students (Jackson & Read, 2012; Lizzio & Wilson, 2013). Currently at UNDA, this is left to individual lecturers to action and to liaise with the course coordinator of students whom they identify as disengaged. There is a possibility that UNDA will have the capacity to implement such a CMS strategy in the future as UNDA is transferring to a new and more sophisticated IT

system over the next two years. This would ensure students studying across Schools do not fall between the two stools.

5.3.1.4 Transition Preparedness

In the interview data, transition preparedness was a dominant category in most of the interview questions. A recurring theme from respondents was preparedness for tertiary studies or lack of it in some cases and the associated anxiety. New expectations and uncertainties of what to expect from higher education was also a common theme. Some participants in the interviews were mid-year intakes in their courses and felt completely unprepared and disappointed that there was not a more significant mid-year orientation program to assist with transition. An interview participant expressed the same frustration regarding orientation for part-time students. Independent learning was another theme that students recognised as necessary skill to master in higher education. Most students in the interviews explained that independent learning became apparent in the early weeks of commencing the degree and it became a conscious and continuous effort to complete university work to prevent them from falling behind and risking failure.

Lack of IT skills, research skills and Learning Management System support were also recurrent themes that participants listed as obstacles to transition. They would have preferred more mandatory-style support for these skills to assist with a smoother transition. Mandatory support, either co-curricular or within the curriculum, were also requested for time management skills, organisation skills and academic skills such as referencing and academic writing. Deliberate and obvious scaffolding of first year units was also listed as a helpful transition strategy. Participants in the interview had experienced scaffolding and breaking down of information in one unit and recognised the benefit of such a strategy and were keen to

experience it in other units as they saw this as enhancing their achievement. The most common entry pathway in this current study was via the ATAR explaining the responses from some participants requesting similar support they would have been familiar with in the formal school setting and were keen to experience a duplication of these directive supports. This, however, would run counter to the University's aim of ensuring students take responsibility for their own learning as adults.

Prior academic success or failure amplified student attitudes in relation to their perceived competency and confidence in their studies and teacher feedback provided a realistic assessment of participant skills in university work. Data from mature age students were polarised in the example of preparedness. Some felt completely unprepared and anxious due to a long break in education and others felt completely prepared because of their life experiences. Half of the interview participants were pleasantly surprised with the feedback they received on assignments. Feedback for these participants boosted their confidence and encouraged greater effort since the comments reflected a higher standard than they believed possible of their academic performance.

Participants in the interview also recognised that delay in seeking support is an unhelpful strategy and strongly supported accessing ASO services as early as possible to assist with academic difficulties. Findings from data to encourage students to access ASO services earlier will be discussed in the next research question.

5.4 Research Question Three: What suggestions do students provide that will enhance access (earlier access) to ASO services?

When participants were asked in the survey and the interviews for ways to encourage student access to ASO services, the top three suggestions in descending order were; more

advertising of ASO services; visits from ASO staff to promote ASO services; and more emails from ASO to inform students of ASO services.

Interestingly, more advertising of ASO services was the number one suggestion from respondents to increase access to ASO services, yet, there are numerous examples of ASO advertising already in place at UNDA. Examples of advertising include: noticeboard advertising; posters around the university; Learning Management System advertising; academic promotion of ASO services in lectures and tutorials; information on the UNDA website; and workshop reminders via email up to three times a week during semester. Reminders on services related to individual appointments are not sent each week but students are reminded periodically throughout the semester about the additional support available if required. It is clear, therefore, that the University should find more effective ways of communicating the services available to students.

An increase in ASO staff was also suggested by respondents to encourage a higher ASO profile in units and courses by visiting students in class and providing more individual availability on campus. There were also recommendations from the interview data regarding the type and frequency of workshops throughout the semester, focusing on common academic skills such as academic writing, referencing and research. Reinforcing this need for more academic writing support, was the finding that the main reason for student academic referrals and self-referrals was the need to improve academic writing.

Other recommendations to encourage earlier access to ASO services earlier include incentives for accessing ASO services such food rewards, certificates and UNDA acknowledgement that students were actively trying to improve their academic skills by

accessing the services. These suggestions relate to external motivation which is a questionable strategy.

Further recommendations for accessing ASO services was to provide more online support, share students testimonials and provide more library services. Some students were content with current ASO methods for accessing support and declared this is their responses. A complete table of these suggestions to increase access to ASO services was presented earlier (see Table 4.5).

5.5 Conclusions

Uncovering the complex nature of student transition into the first year of university and how that process can be best be supported is a multifaceted task and is further complicated by the context of individual institutions. The context of UNDA is unique compared to other higher education institutions because it is driven philosophically by the Objects of the University, regarding excellence in teaching and excellence in pastoral care. The findings of this research have crystallised the importance of UNDAs context and the type of support that is effective in this university and the type of support to consider to further increase support efficacy for students.

ASO services were effective for those who access it, and once students have accessed the service they are likely to return for further assistance if required. However, findings in this study reveal what other research has identified, (Hoyne & McNaught, 2013; Kennelly et al., 2010) that not all students who require ASO services are accessing it. Another significant issue for students, apparent in the findings of this study, was the difficulty students experienced in making the transition from high school to university. This study echoed preparedness findings by Morton, Mergler & Boman (2014). Interview participants were

forthcoming in expressing how under prepared and stressed they felt in an unfamiliar environment with unexpected experiences. Participants also explained how these feelings impacted them emotionally and affected their adjustment into university life, duplicating the findings of Gill et al., (2011). Consequently, increasing enablers to access ASO services and increasing the efficacy of support strategies throughout the university is an important measure to assist transition students. This is particularly crucial as student perceptions in their first year of study can impact on their decision to continue or leave university (Bowles et al., 2014).

The three main factors identified as inhibitors for student access to ASO services were: perceived stigma associated with accessing ASO services; dissemination of information of ASO services; and time constraints. In regards to perceived stigma, it is difficult to alter attitudes associated with stigma and a solution needs to be targeted at an institutional level. If UNDA can communicate the idea that the culture of the university is one of inclusion and reassure students about belonging by normalising approaches to support, then the opportunity for academic success will increase and the stigma students often associate with support will be reduced.

This study has identified a major support issue for ASO services. Under the current support structure it is impossible for ASO services to extend their support reach to students who fall loosely into three categories: those who may be struggling with their studies but not identified by anyone; those who are not comfortable accessing support due to perceived stigma; or those who are unaware they require support. To increase the efficacy of the structure of support of ASO services as more than a peripheral, often self-referred support, university-wide initiatives, such as those described in generation three of Kift's theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy need to be considered. Although participants in this study

did not articulate generation three strategies as a structure of support, the evidence-based research regarding the benefits of embedded support would cater to the academic needs the participants discussed in this study. It would also be unlikely for participants who had not experienced generation three-type support to be able to conceive of it to suggest it. Rather, participants reported their views on the current support structures.

Traditionally in the past, the dominance of support for students at UNDA was based in generation one and two with strategies based around the curriculum and involved peripheral activities from units such as ASO, Student Services and library services. These strategies, according to the findings in this study, continue to be a helpful structure of support for UNDA students. Therefore, the imperative to overhaul current support strategies at UNDA to move wholly to generation three has not been seen as essential. However, to increase support efficacy to capture all students, the implementation of some generation three strategies will be necessary. According to Nelson et al., (2011) the institution-wide approach to academic support assists in combating the difficulties some students experience due to their diverse background as a result of educational, cultural or financial disadvantage.

The prediction of Kift et al., (2010) of Transition Pedagogy as slow transformation of institutional change in smaller, more contextualised universities has been the case with UNDA. Initiatives such as embedding specific types of academic support in School units would be a practical institution wide solution, however, the additional workload this may present for academics would need to be considered. Although many institutions have diversified and expanded their measures to assist students in transition, the best solution is not clear cut and best practice is not one single strategy. However, what has become clear as a result of this study is the importance of context and how each institution will devise best

126

support practices for the nuances of their cohort and environment. The data in this study indicates a combination of support would suit the context of this university with curriculum and co-curriculum strategies aligned to assist students in their studies, particularly in first year when students need to develop academic skills. This type of blended support is a realistic enterprise for UNDA. However, the need to identify to what extent generation three strategies from Kift's Transition Pedagogy theoretical framework, will be implemented into the curriculum to cater appropriately for UNDA students will need to be negotiated and funded.

One way to improve transitioning outcomes for students is to identify the skills that require the most support. The specific types of skill support requested by the majority of respondents in this study were academic writing, research and referencing support. The opportunity to integrate these skills into School core units university-wide, aligns with strategies associated with generation three. This initiative is already occurring in certain Schools at UNDA, including the commitment of the ASO with the School of Nursing. This style of support ensures that struggling students can be captured in class through university-wide measures and the recognition of disengagement of students can be flagged and assisted via collaboration and partnerships between Schools and ASO services. The intent with generation three of Kift's Transition Pedagogical theoretical framework is to devolve the responsibility of supporting students in their transition to all academic staff. In the current model with the School of Nursing, this is still in process with the ASO services seen as collaborating with academic staff, but still holding the responsibility. As the University attempts to broaden this in-School support, there needs to be an additional step in the understanding of academics that transition supports are their purview predominantly, not that of ASO services.

To reduce the overload of academic staff taking on the responsibility of at-risk students, guidelines must be clear to students that the responsibility of learning remains with them; support is not mandated so punitive measures such as withholding grades or follow up disciplinary measures are not required or expected from academic staff. Rather, referral in this instance to ASO services could be effective as ASO has the resources to follow up disengaged students and then practical support can be provided by ASO services in conjunction with academics.

This study has determined the inclusion of a variety of initiatives that provide blended support couched in all three generations of the theoretical framework, as beneficial to UNDA students. This structure of support extends the reach of ASO staff and builds a stronger relationship with academic staff.

Another strong aspect of support at UNDA is student referral where students recognise through engagement with academic staff they may have specific academic needs. Individual appointments need to be advertised more clearly to ensure students are aware the support is available for both remedial and for higher achieving students to maximise their academic achievement. Lack of information about ASO services was identified as an inhibitor of students accessing support due to a lack of awareness and/or lack of knowledge of support location. Advertising and marketing methods need to be reviewed to ensure students are receiving ASO information in a variety of ways when they are most receptive or most in need of accessing the service. This may be early in the semester, after the first lecture, before the submission of their first assignment, when they are feeling overwhelmed, underprepared or incapable of a smooth transition.

A final significant structure of support at UNDA is the implementation of the PELA (see 4.1.4), administered as a diagnostic device to all commencing undergraduate students to identify their entry level of ability in literacy. The PELA is not always well received by students, as evidenced in the interview data, usually due to the surprise element of the assessment. The PELA is not explained in unit outlines and students feel confused by the verbal mandatory explanation given just before the assessment. Students are not mandated to attend support when they are notified of below benchmark results. Mandating support conflicts with the notion that students, who are adults, are forced to learn. The responsibility must remain with the student to be the main player in their tertiary experience. Finally, if the PELA is a diagnostic tool already in place at UNDA, it should be utilised and strengthened to its greatest potential (McNaught & Shaw, 2016). An explanation of PELA written in unit outlines and emphasised during orientation would assist with educating students about the benefit of such an assessment. Increasing the profile of PELA also satisfies ethical and moral obligations for UNDA with the widening of participation of diverse cohorts to even the playing field and ensure all students are given the opportunity to academically perform well in their studies.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

This study takes place in the theory of interpretivism and is therefore subjective by definition. As researcher, however, I have in-depth knowledge and experience in supporting students in transition to university and with their studies. Additionally, I have extensive experience in collaborating with students and was well placed to interpret the data from this experience.

The scope of the study was within the context one university. It was therefore bound by the parameters of the participants, the students, as they constructed social and cultural meaning in completion of the survey and in the interviews. It was imperative during the process that participants be willing to share their experiences, ideas and feelings in order to successfully make deductions and recommendations. Therefore, as researcher, I relied on the authentic contributions of respondents and participants in the interviews. It is likely that the survey data are truly representative of student perceptions as it was completed anonymously. In the interviews, however, it is possible that participants would be inhibited by the presence of other students, or may have been inclined to say what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. My experience in working with students and the fact that there was no lecturer-student power dynamic, may have ameliorated this to an extent, but it remains a limitation of this study.

A further limitation in this study is that perhaps only one specific type of student volunteered for the interviews. However, the survey data provided a broad overview that guided questioning and a deeper understanding of research interest was accessed as a result. My experience in conducting group and individual interviews may have mitigated this to an extent, but this, too, remains a limitation of the study.

5.7 Recommendations for Further Research

Based on this study, there are three recommendations for further research. First, it is recommended, as the staged implementation of generation three of the theoretical framework of Transition Pedagogy takes place, that further evaluative research is undertaken to gauge the effectiveness of strategies trialled.

Second, as students become more familiar with the third generation strategies, there might be less student satisfaction with the current generation one and two strategies that the current study found students appreciate. It will be important to monitor this aspect through ongoing research.

Finally, as the university implements a CMS to assist with the early identification of students in need of support, it will be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of this system from the point of view of both students and staff.

5.8 Concluding Comment from a Student Participant

It is fitting that the final word in this thesis should be that of one of the students:

"Notre Dame has exceeded my expectations probably with the smaller classes, you know, it's personalised, you really do deliver what you say in your mission statement, yeah!"

Reference List

Adam, A., Hartigan, C., & Brown, N. (2010). The value of an open, early academic development program to students' transition and first year experience: The UTAS UniStart program. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 1*(1), 43-54. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v1i1.18

Adam, A., Skalicky, J., & Brown, N. (2011). Planning sustainable peer learning programs: An application and reflection. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 2*(2), 9-22. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i2.81

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C. K., & Walker, D. (2014). *Introduction to research in education* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER]. (2012). *Survey of Student Engagement* (AUSSE) *2012 Institutional Report*. Retrieved from https://www.acer.edu.au/files/AUSSE_2012_Institution_Report.pdf

Barnes, S., Macalpine, G., & Munro, A. (2015). Track and connect: Enhancing student retention and success at the University of Sydney. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 6*(1), 195-202. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v6i1.266

Benske, K. H., Brown, J., & Whitaker, R. (2011). Moving forward: Enhancing progression through partnership. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 2*(1), 49-55. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i1.50

Birrell, B. (2006). Implications of low English standards among overseas students at Australian universities. *People and Place, 14*(4), 53-64. Retrieved from http://arrow.monash.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Collection/monash:63642

Bodhanwala, R. (2015). *Understanding and analysing balance sheets using excel worksheet (3rd ed).* Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited.

Boud, D. (2010). Relocating reflection in the context of practice. *Beyond Reflective Practice: New Approaches to Professional Lifelong Learning*, 25-36. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30071950

Bowles, A., Fisher, R., McPhail, R., Rosenstreich, D., & Dobson, A. (2014). Staying the distance: Students' perceptions of enablers of transition to higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(2), 212-225. doi:10.1080/07294360.2013.832157

Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: Final report*. Retrieved from http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/44384

Briggs, A. R. J., Clark, J., & Hall, I. (2012). Building bridges: Understanding student transition to university. *Quality in Higher Education, 18*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1080/13538322.2011.614468

Brown, N., Adam, A., Douglas, R. & Skalicky, J. (2009). *Why do they come?: A review of individual student learning appointments*. Retrieved from http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers09/content/pdf/6B.pdf

Budgen, F., Main, S., Callcott, D., & Hamlett, B. (2014). The first year at university: Giving social capital a sporting chance. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(7), 157-172. doi:10.14221/ajte.2014v39n7.7

Burnett, L., & Larmar, S. (2011). Improving the first year through an institution-wide approach: The role of first year advisors. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 2*(1), 21-35. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i1.40

Callcott, D., Knaus, M. J., Warren, J., & Wenban, A. (2014). "Network teach": How a student led organisation supports the transition to university. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(8), 1-13. doi:10.14221/ajte.2014v39n8.9

Coates, H.B. (2008). *Australasian Survey of Student Engagement* (AUSSE). Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=ausse

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). London: Routledge.

Coombes, P., Danaher, P., & Danaher, G. (2013). Transforming learning through capacity-building: Maximising life and learning support to mobilise diversities in an Australian pre-undergraduate preparatory program. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 4*(2), 27-37. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i1.169

Couzens, D., Poed, S., Kataoka, M., Brandon, A., Hartley, J., & Keen, D. (2015). Support for students with hidden disabilities in universities: A case study. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 62*(1), 24-41. doi:10.1080/1034912X.2014.984592

Dilshad, R. M., & Latif, M. I. (2013). Focus group interview as a tool for qualitative research: An analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 33*(1), 191-198. Retrieved from http://www.medwelljournals.com/journalhome.php?jid=1683-8831

Dunworth, K. (2010). Clothing the emperor: Addressing the issue of English language proficiency in Australian universities. *The Australian Universities' Review, 52*(2), 5-10. Retrieved from http://www.aur.org.au/

Dunworth, K. (2013). *Degrees of proficiency: Building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development*. Retrieved from http://www.olt.gov.au/project-degrees-proficiency-building-strategic-approach-university-studentsapos-english-language-ass

Edwards, D., & McMillan, J. (2015). *Completing university in Australia: A cohort analysis exploring equity group outcomes*. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/joining_the_dots/29/

Egea, K., Griffiths, N., & McKenzie, J. (2014). An evolving approach to developing academics' understanding of transition for first year students. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(2), 103-109. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i2.235

Gill, B., Ramjan, L., Koch, J., Dlugon, E., Andrew, S., & Salamonson, Y. (2011). Standardised orientation program for first year undergraduate students in the college of health and science at the University of Western Sydney. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 2*(1), 63-69. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i1.48

Girvan, C. (2015). Analysing online text-based group interviews: Exploring learner experience in a virtual world. *Sage Research Datasets,* doi: 10.4135/9781473958821

Goldingay, S., Hitch, D., Ryan, J., Farrugia, D., Hosken, N., Lamaro, G., . . . Macfarlane, S. (2014). "The university didn't actually tell us this is what you have to do": Social inclusion through embedding of academic skills in first year professional courses. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(1), 43-53. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i1.194

Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M. (2012). Investigating attrition trends in order to improve student retention. *Quality Assurance in Education, 20*(3), 223-236. doi:10.1108/09684881211240295

Harris, A. J. (2013). Identifying students requiring English language support: What role can a PELA play? *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 7*(2), A62-A78. Retrieved from http://journal.aall.org.au/

Heirdsfield, A. M., Walker, S. & Walsh, K. M. (2008). *Enhancing the first year experience-longitudinal perspectives on a peer mentoring scheme.* Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/12150/

Hoyne, G. F., & McNaught, K. (2013). Understanding the psychology of seeking support to increase health science student engagement in academic support services. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 4*(1), 109-116. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i1.149

International Education Association of Australia. (2013). *Five years on: English language competence of international students.* Retrieved from http://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/54

Jackson, G., & Read, M. (2012). *Connect for success: A proactive student identification and support program.* Retrieved from http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers12/Papers/9B.pdf

James, R., Krause, K. & Jennings, C. (2010). *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from 1994 to 2009.* Retrieved from https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/52303/FYE_in_Australian_Universities.pdf

Jenkins, G., Lyons, K., Bridgstock, R., & Carr, L. (2012). Like our page-using facebook to support first year students in their transition to higher education. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 3*(2), 65-72. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v3i2.131

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Johnston, H. M. (2011). ALL taking a lead: Enabling first year persistence and success. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 5*(2), A145-A157. Retrieved from http://www.journal.aall.org.au/

Kennelly, R., Maldoni, A., & Davies, D. (2010). A case study: Do discipline-based programmes improve student learning outcomes? *International Journal for Educational Integrity, 6*(1), 61-73. Retrieved from http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/journals/index.php/IJEI/

Kift, S. (2014, February 19, 2014). Student success: Why first year at uni is a make-or-break experience. *The Conversation,* Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/student-success-why-first-year-at-uni-is-a-make-or-break-experience-21465

Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education: Final report for ALTC senior fellowship program*. Retrieved from http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-first-year-learning-experience-kift-2009

Kift, S. (2015). A decade of transition pedagogy: A quantum leap in conceptualising the first year experience. *HERDSA Review of Higher Education, 2*, 51-86. Retrieved from http://herdsa.org.au/herdsa-review-higher-education-vol-2/51-86

Kift, S. M. (2008). The next, great first year challenge: Sustaining, coordinating and embedding coherent institution–wide approaches to enact the FYE as" everybody's business". Paper presented at the *11th International Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, an Apple for the Learner: Celebrating the First Year Experience,* Hobart. Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/14401/

Kift, S., Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J. A. (2010). Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE: A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 1*(1), 1-20. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v1i1.13

Kokkinn, B. A., & Mahar, C. (2011). Partnerships for student success: Integrated development of academic and information literacies across disciplines. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 5*(2), A118-A130. Retrieved from http://journal.aall.org.au/

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus group: A practical guide for applied research (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T., & Riemer, F. J. (Eds.). (2011). *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs.*John Wiley & Sons. Retrieved from http://www.eblib.com

Lefroy, A., Wojcieszek, J., MacPherson, L., & Lake, K. (2014). UniEdge: A first year transition program and its continued evolution through a reflective approach. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(1), 107-116. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i1.195

Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2013). First-year students' appraisal of assessment tasks: Implications for efficacy, engagement and performance. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 38*(4), 389-406. doi:10.1080/02602938.2011.637156

Maher, M., & Macallister, H. (2013). Retention and attrition of students in higher education: Challenges in modern times to what works. *Higher Education Studies, 3*(2), 62-73. doi: 10.5539/hes.v3n2p62

McNaught, K. (2013). The potential impacts of 'Inherent requirements' and 'Mandatory professional reporting' on students, particularly those with mental health concerns, registering with university Disability Support/Equity Services. *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Students Services Association, 42*, 25-29. Retrieved from http://anzssa.com/Public/Public/JANZSSA/Complete_Editions.aspx

McNaught, K., & Beal, E. (2012). The NAME four factor model for engaging students in academic support services. Paper presented at the *35th HERDSA Annual International Conference,* Hobart. *35* 191-212. Retrieved from https://herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-higher-education-connections-higher-18

McNaught, K., & Shaw, G. (2016). Preparing undergraduate students to be successful writers: Exploring the spelling, grammar and punctuation skills of students identified as potentially 'at risk'. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 10*(2), A11-A19. Retrieved from http://www.journal.aall.org.au/

Mertens, D. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Morosanu, L., Handley, K., & O'Donovan, B. (2010). Seeking support: Researching first- year students' experiences of coping with academic life. *Higher Education Research & Development, 29*(6), 665-678. doi:10.1080/07294360.2010.487200

Morton, S., Mergler, A. and Boman, P. (2014) Managing the Transition: The Role of Optimism and Self-Efficacy for First-Year Australian University Students. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *24*(1), 90–108. doi: 10.1017/jgc.2013.29.

Munro, L. (2011). 'Go boldly, dream large!': The challenges confronting non-traditional students at university. *Australian Journal of Education, 55*(2), 115-131. doi:10.1177/000494411105500203

Murray, N. (2011). University post-enrolment English language assessment: A consideration of the issues. *Ergo, 2*(1), 27-33. Retrieved from http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/ergo

Nelson, K., Clarke, J., Kift, S., & Creagh, T. (2011). *Trends in policies, programs and practices in the Australasian first year experience literature 2000-2010. The first year in higher education research series*

on evidence-based practice. (No. 1). Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology. Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/48083/

Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J. A. (2014). The first year experience: Looking back to inform the future. *HERDSA Review of Higher Education, 1*, 23-46. Retrieved from http://herdsa.org.au/herdsa-review-higher-education-vol-1

Nelson, K. J., Creagh, T., Kift, S. M., & Clarke, J. A. (2014). *Transition pedagogy handbook: A good practice guide for policy and practice in the first year experience at QUT.* Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/76333/1/Transition_Pedagogy_Handbook_2014.pdf

Nelson, K. J., Duncan, M. E., & Clarke, J. A. (2009). Student success: The identification and support of first year university students at risk of attrition. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development, 6*(1), 1-15. Retrieved from http://sleid.cqu.edu.au

Nelson, K. J., & Kift, S. M. (2005). Beyond curriculum reform: Embedding the transition experience. Paper presented at the *HERDSA Conference: Higher Education in a Changing World,* Sydney. Retrieved from http://conference.herdsa.org.au/2005/paper_index.cfm.html

Nelson, K. J., Quinn, C., Marrington, A., & Clarke, J. A. (2012a). Good practice for enhancing the engagement and success of commencing students. *Higher Education, 63*(1), 83-96. doi:10.1007/S10734-01 1-9426-y

Nelson, K. J., Smith, J. E., & Clarke, J. A. (2012b). Enhancing the transition of commencing students into university: An institution-wide approach. *Higher Education Research & Development, 31*(2), 185-199. doi:10.1080/07294360.2011.556108

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal, 47*(4), 605-613. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.com/college-student-journal.html

Penn-Edwards, S., & Donnison, S. (2014). A fourth generation approach to transition in the first year in higher education: First year in higher education community of practice (FYHECoP). *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(1), 31-41. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i1.190

Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching [QILT] (2015). *The University of Notre Dame Australia.* Retrieved from https://www.qilt.edu.au/institutions/list/institution/the-university-of-notre-dame-australia

Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 63*(04), 655-660. doi:10.1079/PNS2004399

Ransom, L. (2009). Implementing the post-entry English language assessment policy at the University of Melbourne: Rationale, processes, and outcomes. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 3*(2), A13-A25. Retrieved from http://www.journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/71/64

Read, J. (2015). Issues in post-entry language assessment in English-medium universities. *Language Teaching, 48*(2), 217-234. doi:10.1017/S0261444813000190

Roberts, M. E., Stewart, B. M., Tingley, D., Lucas, C., Leder-Luis, J., Gadarian, S. K., . . . Rand, D. G. (2014). Structural topic models for open-ended survey responses. *American Journal of Political Science, 58*(4), 1064-1082. doi:10.1111ajps.12103

Rodrigo, D., Khamis, C., Lead, P., Sahukar, Z., McDonagh, N., & Nguyen, M. (2014). Same-same but different: Integrating central university support and faculty-specific knowledge for mentor training. A practice report.

The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5(2), 111-117. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i2.236

Sheard, M. (2009). Hardiness commitment, gender, and age differentiate university academic performance. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*(1), 189-204. doi:10.1348/000709908X304406

Stewart, J., & Heaney, A. (2013). Admission rhetoric and academic self-efficacy: The importance of first communications for conditionally admitted students. *Journal of College Admission, Spring* (219), 26-31. Retrieved from http://www.nacacnet.org/research/publicationsresources/journal/Pages/Journal-of-College-Admission.aspx

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Tertiary Education Quality Standard Agency. (2013). *Quality assessment: English language proficiency.* Retrieved from http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/EnglishLanguageProficiencyQATerms.pdf

The Good Universities Guide. (2016). *The University of Notre Dame Australia Ratings and Rankings 2016/2017.*. Retrieved from http://ratings.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/the-university-of-notre-dame-australia

Tingley, D. (2014). Survey research in international political economy: Motivations, designs, methods. *International Interactions, 40*(3), 443-451. doi:10.1080/03050629.2014.900614

Wahr, F., Gray, K., & Radloff, A. (2009). Improving student transition in the university by working with staff conceptions of the student experience: An academic development approach. Paper presented at the *The 32nd HERDSA Annual Conference,* Darwin. 434-443. Retrieved from https://herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-higher-education-student-experience-66

Walsh, C., Larsen, C., & Parry, D. (2009). Academic tutors at the frontline of student support in a cohort of students succeeding in higher education. *Educational Studies, 35*(4), 405-424. doi:10.1080/03055690902876438

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Open University Press. Retrieved from http://www.ebrary.com

Wojcieszek, J., Theaker, L., Ratcliff, M., MacPherson, L., & Boyd, J. (2014). Enhancing the first year student experience through academic and professional staff collegiality. A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*(1), 143-151. doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i1.211

Worley, P. (2015). Open thinking, closed questioning: Two kinds of open and closed question. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools, 2*(2), 17-29. Retrieved from http://ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/jps/article/view/1269

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and method*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage

Zamberlan, L., & Wilson, S. (2015). Developing an embedded peer tutor program in design studio to support first year design students. *Journal of Peer Learning, 8*(1), 5-17. Retrieved from http://ro.uow.edu.au/

Zapke, N., Leach, L., & Butler, P. (2009). The role of teacher-student interactions in tertiary student engagement. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 44*(1), 69-82. Retrieved from http://www.nzare.org.nz/nzjes.aspx

Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 11*(3), 167-177. doi:10.1177/1469787410379680

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions 1 – 24

Title of Survey Monkey: What factors inhibit or enable student access ASO services?

1. What School of study do you belong to?

○ School of Arts and Science

○ School of Business

○ School of Education

○ School of Law

○ School of Nursing

2. Are you male or female?

○ Male

○ Female

3. What entry pathway was most applicable when you enrolled at Notre Dame?

☐ ATAR

☐ STAT (Special Tertiary Admissions Test)

☐ Certificate IV/Diploma

☐ Enabling Pathway

☐ Mature Age

4. Are you the first person in your immediate family to study at University?

○ Yes

○ No

5. What socioeconomic status (SES) do you consider your family to be?
(Definition: Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combined measure of an individuals or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation).

○ high socio-economic status

○ middle socio-economic status

○ low socio-economic status

6. If you received an ATAR in the last 5 years did you score?

○ 50 or less

○ 51-64

○ 65-74

○ 75-84

○ 85 or above

○ Not applicable

7. Are you are aware of the lunch time Academic (Study Skills) Workshops presented weekly on a variety of topics by the Academic Support Office (ASO) staff during each semester?

○ Yes

○ No

8. Are you are aware of the lunch time Mathematics Workshops presented by the ASO staff weekly during each semester?

○ Yes

○ No

9. How many Academic Skills (Study Skills) and Mathematics workshops with the ASO have you attended this year?

○ 0

○ 1-2

○ 3-4

○ more than 5

10. Were you aware that you can book an individual appointment with an Academic Support officer from the ASO to assist you with your studies/university work?

○ Yes

○ No

11. Select one service that you are aware the ASO assist and support students with?

○ Academic obstacles (academic writing problems, understanding academic texts)

○ Study skill issues

○ Procrastination and distraction issues

○ Transition difficulties to tertiary education

○ Assignment check prior to submission to check assignment criteria, academic writing and reference check.

○ Help with getting started on assessment tasks

○ Assisting with academic writing

○ Referencing Support

○ Exam support

12. If you were referred to the ASO, who referred you?

○ Self-referral

○ Academic staff

○ Non-academic staff

○ Counselling service

○ Disability and Equity Support Office

○ PELA (Post Entrance Literacy Assessment) recommendation

○ Not applicable not referred

13. Give the reason for your referral to the ASO (include reasons for self-referral) or write NA for "not-applicable".

14. If you needed academic assistance with the ASO but did not seek help, why? (or write NA if "not-applicable").

15. How easy is it to access ASO services at the University of Notre Dame?

○ Very easy

○ Moderately easy

○ Neither easy or diffcult

○ Moderately difficult

○ Very difficult

○ Not applicable never accessed

16. Overall, are you satisfied with your ASO experience at the University of Notre Dame? In the comment box below briefly explain why or why not?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Never accessed ASO services

Why or why not? (please specify)

17. List one way the Academic Support Office (ASO) could encourage students to access their services?

18. How would/does accessing the ASO services make you feel? Why?

19. Did you pass the benchmark in the Post Entrance Literacy Assessment (PELA) for reading?

○ Yes

○ No

20. Did you pass the benchmark in the PELA for writing?

○ Yes

○ No

21. If you were below benchmark in your PELA result in first year did you access the recommended ASO support? Write why or why not in the space below?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable passed PELA

Why or why not?

22. If you could choose any type of support or help to assist a smoother transition to your studies in first year what would it be?

23. What topics would you most like included in the Academic and Study Skills workshops presented during the semester by the ASO at the University of Notre Dame? (you can tick more than one box)

☐ Time Management

☐ Analysing Assignment tasks

☐ Creating an Essay Argument

☐ Research skills

☐ Reading skills

☐ Writing skills

☐ Essay skills

☐ Exam Preparation

☐ Stress Management

☐ Mathematic skills

☐ Improving your Memory

☐ Critical Thinking

☐ Referencing support

☐ Assistance with procrastination

☐ Strategies to assist distraction

☐ Academic Resilience

Other (please specify)

24. In semester 1, did you

☐ Pass all units

☐ Failed one unit

☐ Failed more than one unit

Appendix B: Interview Questions 1 - 10

1. **How prepared did you feel starting your tertiary education?**
    Prompt questions
    - What did you expect University to be like?
    - What would have helped you transition better to tertiary education in those first few weeks?

2. **According to the survey results a large number of students (77%) are aware of the lunchtime Academic (Study Skills) Workshops but the survey data shows a lack of attendance. Can you suggest reasons why?**
    Prompt questions.
    - Why this is the case when students are asking for support on workshop topics but not coming to workshops?
    - Can you suggest ways to increase attendance at workshops?

3. **Survey results indicate students are not as aware of the Mathematic Workshops as compared to the Academic (Study Skills) Workshops (50%). Why, when both workshops are advertised in the same way?**
    Prompt Questions
    - How could the Mathematic workshops be more accessible to students needing numeracy assistance?
    - What format would be most helpful for the Mathematic workshops?
      Format examples may include general topics, course specific mathematics, drop-in sessions or individual appointments?

4. **What services do you think ASO mostly assist students with?**
    Prompt Questions
    - What do students mostly need help with? (58% listed essay support).
    - What do they need the least help with?

5. **If students were struggling and did not seek support, why?**

6. **To what extent are the Notre Dame emails effective reminders of ASO services?**
    Prompt questions
    - Do you delete the ASO adverts or do you genuinely peruse the topics to see if any may be of interest?
    - Do you believe social media would be a good form of advertising for ASO services?

7. **Do you know what the Post Entrance Literacy Assessment (PELA) is**?
   Prompt questions
   - The PELA question was skipped by 187 students (out of 366), do you have any suggestions why?
   - If benchmark was not reached on PELA, students were advised to contact the ASO for academic assistance. According to the survey results students did not contact the ASO for support, can you suggestions reasons why?

8. **Looking back since you first started university at the beginning of 2015, what areas did you struggle most with? Either academic or non-academic.**

9. **Moving forward and putting initiatives/strategies in place in the future to assist first year students with academic support, what ideas can you suggest? Some ideas include the following:**
   Prompt ideas
   - Peer mentoring programs
   - Embedding PELA in core literacy units
   - Embedding specific academic skills such as essay writing and referencing skills into core units in your course.
   - Formalising regulations within the university to ensure that students who have failed a unit/s must access ASO services?

10. **What is Notre Dame doing well to support students?**
    Prompt question
    - What makes you connect to this institution?

Appendix C: Email to Deans requesting approval for research

Louise Johnston
Student Support Coordinator Academic Support
Academic Support Office (ASO)
Academic Enabling and Support Centre (AESC)
The University of Notre Dame, Sydney.
Master in Education by Research

15 May 2015

Dear Deans

I am conducting a study to determine the factors that inhibit or enable student access to Academic Support Office (ASO) services for my Master of Education by Research degree. I would like to request your permission to survey first year undergraduate students in some of your units.The survey will take about 10 minutes and I would like to administer the survey in person if possible.

I am undertaking this study for several reasons. Firstly, to ensure students are aware of our Academic Support Office (ASO) services and the ways in which ASO can best assist students with their studies; secondly, to target groups or students that may be predisposed to being academically at-risk (including those that fell below the benchmark in PELA) and thirdly, to implement timely inventions and programs that best cater to the population of students enrolled at the University of Notre Dame.

If you agree to support this research, could you please let me know who the best person in your School to liaise regarding details of appropriate classes to administer the survey. Please email me on louise.johnston@nd.edu.au with the person's contact details. Thank you in advance.

Please find enclosed the Participation Information Sheet for potential student participants and a copy of the survey questions.

Kind regards

Louise Johnston

Appendix D: Participation Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research project. The project investigates factors that contribute to student decisions to access or not access Academic Support Office (ASO) services in the Academic Enabling and Support Centre (AESC). The findings derived from this research will enable the ASO to continue to meet the academic needs of students and improve support services where possible.

You will be asked to complete an in-class survey covering a range of questions such as demographic information, awareness of ASO services and suggestions for a smoother transition into first year. Information gathered from this survey will be anonymous and you will not be identifiable by your responses. There are no risks associated with this project, it is completely confidential. We will not be able to identify who has completed the survey. This project will not affect your ongoing access to ASO services nor your progress in your course of study.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Notre Dame Australia (Approval number 015085S). If you wish to make a complaint regarding the manner in which this research project is conducted, it should be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Committee, Research Office, the University of Notre Dame, Australia, PO Box 1225, Fremantle, WA 6959, Phone (08) 9433 0943, research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and will be fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. Consent is implied once you submit a completed survey.

If you have any questions or queries about the project please contact Louise Johnston at louise.johnston@nd.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Johnston
Student Support Program Coordinator
Academic Support Office
Academic Enabling and Support Centre