

Supporting Non-Traditional Students: Some Success and Failure Stories from Western Sydney University, Australia

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Abstract

In line with the worldwide widening participation initiatives which aim to increase the participation of under-represented groups in higher education, the Australian government as well as Australian universities have also been encouraging more enrolment among non-traditional students who may not enrol at universities for a number of reasons, e.g. coming from low socio-economic status backgrounds, being First in Family, being from Indigenous background or being from non-English speaking background. It is generally acknowledged that these students often face challenges and experience hardships during their first year of studies; some may be able to overcome those hardships and succeed but others may fail. More studies need to be conducted to further investigate the factors that contribute to successes and/or failures of non-traditional students who have just started their learning journeys. This presentation will offer some snapshots of failures and successes of non-traditional students who were enrolled in various Academic English classes at Western Sydney University College in Australia between February and June 2023; these Academic English classes are normally offered as preparatory subjects for first year students studying at Western Sydney University College. In addition, the presentation will address the need to review academic and non-academic support for those students who are at-risk of failing Academic English subjects due to engagement and/or attendance issues. It is further argued that adequate and tailored support need to be provided to increase non-traditional student engagement and retention.

Keywords: academic literacy, academic outcomes, equity, higher education, university pathways