

On Being Strategic About the First Year
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Introduction

The term 'strategy' is said to originate in the ancient Greek term 'strategos' signifying a leader in the army. This militaristic association is denoted in several dictionary definitions of the term that define strategic behaviour variously as:

- the science and art of military command exercised to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions;
- intended to render the enemy incapable of making war;
- essential to the conduct of war; and
- intended to destroy the military potential of an enemy.

More broadly, being 'strategic' is defined as foundational to achieving an intended objective or plan (dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/strategic>; Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/strategy>).

One hesitates to equate the first year experience and its effective management with war, though elsewhere I have argued that, for some students, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds, the transition to university can be a significant battle in that it may constitute a conflict of values, a challenge to one's identity and a threat to familiar ways of knowing and doing (see Krause, 2006a). Whether or not one subscribes to the 'battle' analogy, there certainly is an argument to be made for the importance of strategic thinking, planning, policy-making and action as fundamental to supporting successful student transition to higher education.

This paper poses two questions: first, 'why consider strategic approaches to the first year in higher education?' and second, 'how can we be more strategic about supporting the first year experience?'. The first section briefly establishes the context and provides a rationale for advocating more strategic approaches to the first year. The second section addresses the question of how policy-makers and practitioners might be more strategic. To provide a framework for strategic policy-making, a model of student engagement is proposed (see also Appendix 1 for strategies to enhance student engagement). The model highlights the multidimensional nature of engagement and the need for informed policy to support all facets of the student experience. To facilitate practical implementation of strategic approaches, the *Five Cs of Good Practice in the First Year* are proposed as a guide to shape strategic practice in curriculum design, in the classroom, among colleagues, on the campus, and in the community.

Why consider strategic approaches in relation to the first year?

There are several important reasons for developing and adopting more strategic approaches to the first year experience. One of the most important of these is that the students, themselves, are highly strategic and universities need to be proactive in shaping novice students' experiences, attitudes and behaviours. Other reasons for taking the time to consider strategic approaches in regard to the first year of university include a range of factors at local, national and international level that play a part in shaping the first year. Strategic responses to these factors are crucial if we are to maintain standards and rigour in the first year, while at the same time being responsive to the changing environment in which students live, study and work – both now and in the future. A selection of these issues is touched on briefly here by way of establishing context.

Strategic students

First year Y-genners trade with expertise in the knowledge economy and study their career options carefully. They are familiar with their university's marketing material and tend to have a

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clear sense of purpose on entering university (see Krause, 2005). This is particularly the case for international students who now comprise a quarter of all undergraduate students in Australian higher education. These students have made significant sacrifices in many cases – both financial and personal – and they are typically well-informed about their course and university of choice.

Following is a brief summary of the main differences between a sample of emergent Generation Y first year students surveyed in 2004 and their tail-end X Generation counterparts who were surveyed a decade earlier. Empirical data supporting this summary are available in a research report documenting the national trend study: *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a decade of national studies* (Krause et al., 2005).

Compared to 10 years ago, the 21st century first year student is more likely to:

- be clearer about why s/he has come to university;
- consider him/herself a 'client' being served by the university;
- want a 'portable degree' that will prepare her/him for multiple career pathways;
- expect the choice of combined/dual degrees and flexible modes of delivery; and
- expect the accompanying resources (technology, anywhere anytime, seamless support) to help them achieve this aim.

The Y Generation students sampled in 2004 were more likely than their counterparts in 1994 to:

- really enjoy being a university student;
- regularly seek advice from academic staff; and
- be relatively satisfied with the quality of teaching at university.

There is widespread recognition that patterns of student engagement in higher education are changing (Yorke, 2003). One reason for this is the part-time paid employment phenomenon. There is much to be learned about the role of students' paid work in skill development and the potentially positive impact of these generic skills on student learning in higher education. To equate paid work with disengagement is to under-estimate the potential value of the experience and ways in which it might be capitalised upon. Evidence suggests that, at least for some students, as they take on a range of commitments, they develop strategic approaches to time management and prioritising of activities. For instance, one second year student summarised it this way (Krause, 2003):

In my first year, I wasn't working and I just seemed to waste so much time. Now that I have a job, I really have to budget my time well and use it wisely. I have learned so much about time management since I've been working.

Of course, not all students relate such positive experiences. Commitment to paid work may interfere with student achievement and progress, and may add to the stress of making a successful transition to first year (Krause et al., 2005). Nevertheless, as the proportion of full-time first year students committed to paid work increases in Australian universities (1999: 51%; 2004: 55% of the full-time first year population sampled), one may argue that, increasingly, students find it necessary to be more strategic about how they manage their time, their learning and their relationships.

A further example of strategic behaviour is the use of online resources for study purposes. In the national first year study (Krause et al., 2005), 95% of students said they used web-based course materials (e.g., downloading course notes) on a regular basis. The Y Generation are also much more connected than previous generations. A recent study of 2,000 first year students at the University of Melbourne (Kennedy, Krause, et al., 2006) found that 96% had a mobile phone and 80% of them used their phones to SMS daily. Two-thirds of first year students used the web for email on a daily basis, while more than half used the web for instant messaging. More than one-third (35%) maintained a blog and one in ten of these bloggers actively contributed to their blog daily. While it may be argued that not all online and mobile interactions are strategic and planful, nevertheless, these connections enable students to be strategic when it comes to catching up with friends to discuss class assignments, downloading course notes, or emailing academic staff when they have a question. Table 1 illustrates the significant increase over ten years in the proportion of students who regularly seek advice or help from academic staff – whether by email, phone or face-to-face.

Table 1 Student engagement with academic staff
(% of students) (1994, N=4 028; 1999, N=2 609; 2004, N=2344)

		Disagree		Agree
I regularly seek advice or help from academic staff	1994	49	30	20
	1999	50	31	19
	2004	36	35	29** ^{1 2}

** significant at .05 ¹ Denotes significant change 1999 to 2004. ² Denotes significant change 1994 to 2004.

Related to the immediacy and ubiquity of student access to online resources is the fact that they tend to have a zero tolerance for delay, along with a 24x7 mentality (Frاند, 2000). Kvavik and Caruso (2005) note the 'convenience' mentality that underpins students' expectations regarding the use of ICTs at university. In their study of 18,000 undergraduate students across 63 universities, Kvavik and Caruso found that the primary role of ICTs in the eyes of students was to enable convenient access to information and support. Students wanted: technology and online resources readily available; a fast response time; converged devices; and networks and technical support available 24/7.

Strategic responses to national and international demands and developments

As noted above (see Yorke, 2003), patterns of student engagement are changing and universities face the challenge of ensuring a high quality first year experience for an increasingly diverse range of students. Along with this comes the challenge to be strategic about supporting student transition into the institution, facilitating premium quality, authentic learning experiences, and providing them with good reasons to stay beyond the first year. The issue of student retention in an age of mass higher education demands highly strategic responses on the part of universities.

National-level performance-based funding in the form of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund brings into sharp focus the need to combine retention strategies with strategies for providing a high quality learning experience across the undergraduate years. Key indicators guiding funding decisions in this regard are first year student retention and successful progress from first to second year and beyond.

Strategic responses are also required in response to the fact that we are now welcoming more customer-oriented students onto our campuses. Careful planning and thought must be given to how we manage student expectations in such an environment: balancing responsive action with responsible curriculum, assessment and student support initiatives demands strategic thinking of the highest level. Strategic thinking and action is also demanded of universities in light of the demands of industry for more work-ready, well-rounded, 'T-graduates' who demonstrate both depth of knowledge and breadth of skills and experience. Industry and broader community pressures are brought to bear in both national and international contexts and are a stark reminder of the need for strategic approaches in response to the global knowledge economy in which universities and their students operate.

Having identified several important reasons for adopting strategic approaches to the first year experience, attention now shifts to the question of how a university and its members operationalise strategic thinking and action.

Being strategic about policy in the first year

Informed and strategic policy-making is a key to success in the first year. Before discussing some of the practical strategies for enhancing the first year experience, it is critical to ensure that these are developed in a responsive, whole-of-institution and evidence-based policy environment. Responsive policy-making is primarily enabled when decision-makers are well-informed about who their first year students are (background, learning needs, expectations etc.) and how best to support them before, during and beyond the first year. A key to addressing the

latter is a sound knowledge of institutional capacity, curriculum issues, staff development needs and the like.

In determining strategic policy directions to enhance the first year experience, the primary goal should be to engage the first year student. To guide thinking in this regard, the model in Figure 1 depicts a range of factors that should be taken into account when designing policies to enhance first year student engagement with learning, with peers and staff, with self and one's emerging identity as a first year student, with the institution, and with the broader community (see also Appendix 1).

This model is particularly relevant to the first year student making the transition to university life and learning; however the principles underpinning the model relate also to the multiple transitions that students experience as they move from one year level to the next, from one subject area to the next, and so on. The model acknowledges that any discussion of student engagement must give due consideration to contextual factors beyond the university, including students' educational, linguistic and sociocultural background and experiences. Other key factors that play a role in student engagement include students' paid work and other life commitments. Engagement is also influenced by students' perceptions of how relevant the university experience is in terms of personal career aspirations and goals for the future.

The quality and depth of students' engagement with the complex array of dimensions of the university experience, will vary according to the individual background and external factors already noted, as well as their connections within the institutions in a range of domains. The model presents several of these domains and represents the ideal situation in that, in all respects, the relationships between the student, the institution, and external factors are shown to be reciprocal. In the case of factors within the university, research confirms the formative role of peers and peer collaboration within cohort groups, and across year levels, disciplines and classroom boundaries as a means of maximizing opportunities for student engagement, particularly in the first year. We know, too, the importance of students engaging with staff members as individuals and as academic departments and communities of scholars.

As well as connecting with peers and staff with whom they will have closest contact in the learning community, students face the challenge of engaging with the institution itself – its culture, tradition and those taken-for-granted practices that may be so very alien to students from diverse and under-represented backgrounds (see Krause, 2006a). There is a need, too, for engaging with those who will provide crucial support in the form of student affairs staff and services.

Figure 1 shows two further sets of connections that are foundational to successful student engagement. Students need to learn how to learn in higher education and, beyond this, they need to learn how to make links to the disciplinary community of practice (or multidisciplinary community, as the case may be). My observation is that we have devoted much time to the social integration dimension of first year student connections, but insufficient time on these central elements of what it is to learn with and belong to a community of scholars.

As the student body diversifies, and as students enter universities from increasingly diverse backgrounds and educational experiences, so the imperative to equip them with the necessary skills for engaging with tertiary learning requires our fullest attention. Not only do students need to come to terms with what it is to learn and succeed in higher education, but they also need to learn the new language and conventions of their disciplinary study – a challenge that is so often overlooked if we restrict our efforts to academic literacy development in decontextualised settings.

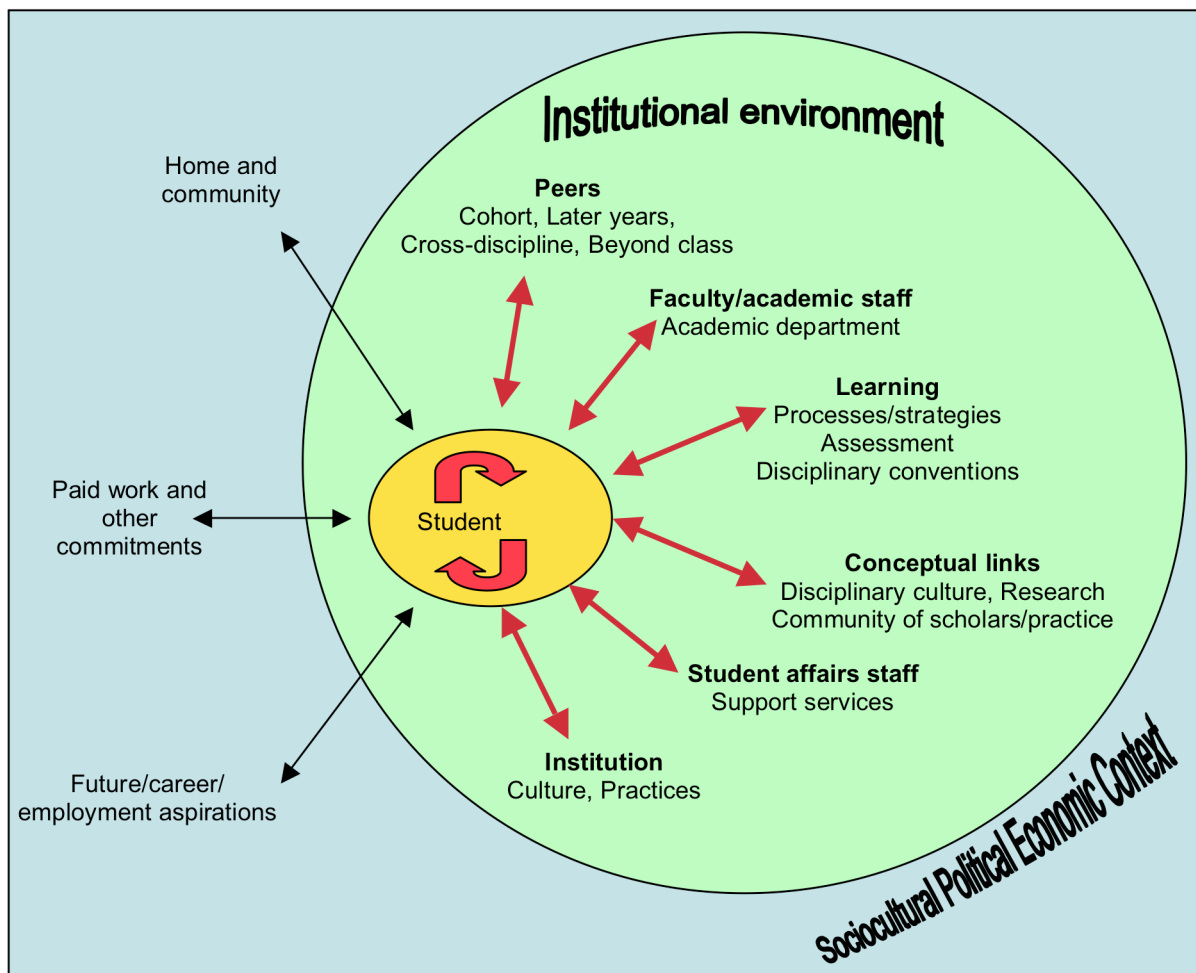
Conceptual connectedness and engagement in the student experience is enhanced when close ties between teaching and research are evident in the curriculum. Internationally, there is growing awareness of the need to connect students to the research and researchers of their chosen discipline as a way of engaging them within a scholarly community that extends well beyond the traditional boundaries of classroom and institution. Research-infused learning and teaching provides an important pathway for helping students to make conceptual links with their learning in its disciplinary context, as well as with the broader community of scholars, who

contribute to the thinking and the scholarship of discovery and ideas in the discipline. Research-led learning and teaching is not restricted to graduate students in research-led universities. Rather, it may be put into practice in creative ways across year levels including first year, and across institutional types to maximize the quality of student engagement and to help them to connect to a community of ideas, discovery and scholars in their discipline.

Where students are effectively engaged and integrated into the institution, their connections with the facets of the university community are strong and seamless, and the institution reciprocates by ensuring that every effort has been made to be relevant to students' lives beyond the university. The growing interest in public scholarship (Eberly & Cohen, 2006) and the process of engaging students in meaningful community-based learning is a good example of such outreach.

An important element of first year student engagement is that which involves the student in self-reflection during the engagement process, as depicted by the circular arrows in the model. The well-adjusted and engaged student is one who assesses and reassesses their thinking as transitions and opportunities to engage in different ways continue through and beyond the first year of university.

Figure 1. Dimensions of student engagement: a model (Krause, 2006)



A whole-of-institution response to support the holistic development and engagement of first year students lies at the heart of this model. While institution-specific characteristics and priorities must necessarily be integrated into such a model, it nevertheless serves as an instructive guide for informed and strategic policy-making to support the first year experience.

Being strategic about practice in the first year

Policy and practice in relation to the first year experience should be synergistic and dynamically interconnected. Guided by evidence-based and strategic policies, first year practices should be aligned with and supportive of institutional and departmental/faculty first year policies. In turn, policies should be sufficiently flexible and responsive as to accommodate and support evolving practices that may change as a result of feedback from ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

To enable strategic practices in the first year, I propose the *Five Cs of Good Practice in the First Year*. These are closely aligned with the model presented in Figure 1 and intended as a guide to shape strategic practice in curriculum design, in the classroom, among colleagues, on the campus and in the community.

C1. CURRICULUM: Strategic approaches to the first year curriculum

Coherent and holistic approaches to planning, delivering and reviewing the first year curriculum are foundational to success in the first year. The formal curriculum represents all the planned learning opportunities offered by the university to learners and the experiences learners encounter when the curriculum is implemented (Print, 1993). However, as Gaff and colleagues point out (1996, p.1):

There is the curriculum offered by the university, taught by the academics, and learned by the students. Ideally, all these various views of the curriculum would be similar, but, alas, it is not necessarily so.

To maximise the possibility of alignment between different curricular elements and student experiences across the institution, it is important that the values espoused in university policies be operationalised in the day-to-day delivery of the curriculum. Some ways to ensure this in regard to the first year curriculum include:

- Institution-wide ownership of the principles underpinning effective curriculum design for the first year. This may include disciplinary representatives sharing good practice and curriculum principles, transdisciplinary collaboration in curriculum design, and a healthy combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to curriculum design in the first year. In other words, in designing the first year curriculum, institutional policy should be informed by disciplinary priorities and vice versa.
- A shared understanding of how to integrate assessment and feedback structures into the curriculum so as to enhance student learning. In other words, shifting from 'assessment of learning' to 'assessment for learning' in the first year.
- Practical approaches to incorporating the principles of research-led learning and teaching into the curriculum from the first year. The principles of the teaching-research nexus should inform curriculum development and delivery from the first year as a way of promoting a sense of belonging to a community of scholars with a focus on discovery and creation of knowledge. Even in the first year, the curriculum can be designed to facilitate research-led pedagogy.
- Strategic integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the curriculum to support learning (see Krause, 2006b).
- Development of foundational academic literacy skills within the context of the discipline, through such mechanisms as cooperation with learning skills advisers and other support structures. The first year curriculum should be planned in such a way that students not only learn content knowledge, but also have opportunities to learn how to learn as part of their transition to university.
- Planned opportunities for authentic learning and assessment from early in the first year.

Effective curriculum design, delivery and evaluation underpin successful first year practices in universities. Structures should be set in place to accommodate conversations about the curriculum across the institution to reduce unnecessary duplication of effort, to share effective practice, to ensure ownership, and to maximize coherence of curriculum structures. This requires systematically planned professional development for academic staff, offered at both institutional and disciplinary levels.

C2. CLASSROOM: Strategic classroom practice in the first year

Once the curriculum has been developed, the classroom becomes the primary avenue for its delivery. Formal learning opportunities remain a key to engaging students in premium quality learning experiences that connect them to the academic and social dimensions of university life. The 'classroom' may be bounded by physical walls or virtual space. It may be on the campus or in the field.

Strategies for enhancing classroom practices in the first year include:

- Create an environment in which students feel that they are known and belong. In small groups, know the names of your students and ensure that they have opportunity to learn each others' names. In large groups, use strategies such as arriving at class early, moving around the lecture theatre (particularly to the back rows!), and student consultation to ensure that students know you are interested in them as individuals. Many helpful and practical resources are available on this topic (see for example: <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/largeclasses/>).
- Use early and continuous assessment and timely feedback to: engage with your students; monitor their progress; communicate standards and expectations; encourage students to self-manage and self-assess; reward those who are succeeding; and identify early those at risk.
- Ensure that active and experiential learning are part of the curriculum – this may include class presentations, groupwork, problem-based and case-based learning, fieldwork, work-based learning and the like.
- Plan opportunities for students to learn from and with peers in groupwork situations and similar. These opportunities may take place in the classroom, in class projects requiring students to meet out of class, and online.
- Use classroom interactions to develop intercultural competencies. This may include providing guidelines on how to work with students from different backgrounds, planning groupwork that requires students to work with peers from at least two different countries of birth, selecting coursework and reading materials that expand students' knowledge of cross-cultural issues within a disciplinary context, and modeling of attitudes, values and behaviours that support student development of intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

C3. COLLEAGUES: Strategic approaches to support for and from colleagues working with first years

Strategic practices in the first year include working with and learning from colleagues in a range of ways. These include:

- Ensure that all staff receive professional development appropriate to their needs. For sessional staff, this may include basic training; for leaders of curriculum development this may include more specialized support; for academic staff working with first years, this may include workshops designed to raise issues, and provide practical support and resources to assist them in managing changing patterns of student engagement.
- Networking of staff across the institution is a key to successful first year practice. Academic and professional staff (e.g. those providing student support) need opportunities to share common concerns and to determine how best to work together to achieve a seamless high quality first year experience for students in transition to university life and learning.
- Actively build networks of 'first year champions' across the institution. These people are a vital resource for their colleagues. Good practices in the first year should be identified, celebrated and shared.
- Opportunities to work with colleagues across disciplines and beyond the institution should be encouraged.

C4. CAMPUS: Strategic approaches to first year life on campus

The quality of campus life and experiences is a critical 'C' in the first year good practice toolkit. There is much concern that campus life is being compromised and threatened by such factors

as Voluntary Student Unionism² (VSU) and students' commitment to paid work that takes them off campus. While these threats certainly exist, strategies for engaging students in campus life should nevertheless be pursued vigorously. Some strategies include:

- A comprehensive system of induction to university life for incoming first year students. Students' first encounters with the university establish a lasting impression. If students see the campus as a place to connect with people, to find support, to access services, to study and learn, then they will be more likely to make the effort to engage with the campus. In many cases, induction has its beginnings in school visits and invitations to high school students to visit the campus and become acquainted with it prior to enrolment.
- In light of changing patterns of student engagement, universities must now consider the 'campus' as having a virtual dimension. Student portals, learning management systems and online support should be seen as part of the virtual campus experience. Priority should be given to determining the best ways of engaging students in this part of the campus, while also pointing them in the direction of the 'real' campus and face-to-face contact where possible.
- Academic staff need to be strategic about engaging students in campus life. In setting group assignments, the lecturer may suggest places where first year students might meet to work on assignments out of class. In addition to suggesting online resources, the teacher may also suggest effective ways of using the library. It is important that academics demonstrate awareness of student life and experiences beyond classroom walls.
- Attention should be given to creating spaces for students to meet on campus. Again, this may occur in both real and virtual environments. To encourage online communication, academics may create virtual fora and model ways in which these may be used. The fact that students use online technologies to communicate in their social lives does not guarantee that they know how to harness these for the purposes of deep learning and engagement in academic settings.

C5. COMMUNITY: Strategic approaches to first years in the community

The final 'C' of good practice takes learning into the community setting. First and foremost, first year students need to be integrated into the university learning community. A sense of belonging is conducive to enhanced engagement, satisfaction with learning and commitment to study. As part of building a wider learning community that extends beyond the campus, the value of authentic learning in real-world contexts is widely acknowledged. The challenge for practitioners is to support students in taking the scholarship of classroom learning into the community and to return to the classroom with real-world learning.

As noted in the earlier discussion on strategic policy-making, public scholarship (Eberly & Cohen, 2006) is about staff and students using university learning to contribute to the public good. Knowledge transfer in the higher education setting may be seen on a continuum, ranging from student involvement in community projects (e.g. volunteering in a local community centre – often referred to as 'civic engagement' or 'service learning'), to the integration of public scholarship into the curriculum and assessment structures of a course. It is beyond the scope of this paper to expand on this important issue, suffice to say that there is much to be learned and gained from students engaging in the community – both their immediate university learning community, and the broader community - from their first year³. Wider community engagement and public scholarship may manifest itself in some of the following ways:

- Volunteer work in the community that is documented and reflected in student portfolios and resumes.
- Community involvement that is part of an assessable project (either individually or in groups) on which students report and reflect.

² VSU: a federal initiative to prevent Australian universities from charging mandatory student fees to support campus-based, student-managed services)

³ Some useful starting points for reading on this topic are:

<http://www.com.washington.edu/program/publicscholarship/index.html>

<http://www.csps.emory.edu/>

<http://www.compact.org/>

<http://servicelearningcommission.org/slcommission/index.html>

- Scholarly and creative work jointly planned and carried out by university and community/industry partners.

Clearly, these five 'C' elements are interconnected and overlapping. Research-led learning may include a community involvement component, effective classroom practices are part of the broader curriculum design and so on. It is important to mention that monitoring and evaluation of strategic approaches in the first year is, of course, an essential dimension of good practice.

This paper has drawn attention to the fact that it is essential to be strategic in relation to the first year in all its complexity. This demands astute and proactive planning, the adoption of evidence-based approaches, and close collaboration across the institution, and also beyond it. As in a war situation, our strategies and the success with which we implement them, are critically important. There are good reasons for being strategic about the first year – there is a great deal at stake. Apart from local, national and international imperatives, it is important to be strategic because our students, themselves, are strategic about their decision-making, priorities and expectations. To support these students in pedagogically sound and educationally responsible ways demands a whole-of-institution response that is underpinned by responsive policies and operationalised by creative, informed and inclusive practices.

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Appendix 1
Ten Working Principles for Enhancing Student Engagement

Source: Krause, 2006a

1. **Create and maintain a stimulating intellectual environment**
 - Give students good reasons to be part of the learning community.
 - Provide coherent and responsive curricula and course structures.
 - Make it a priority to include elements of public scholarship to ensure relevance of the curriculum in a wider community context.
 - Stimulate discussion and debate, exploration and discovery that extends well beyond the traditional classroom setting onto the campus and into the community and workplace, where appropriate.
2. **Value academic work and high standards**
 - Actively encourage commitment to study by attaching importance to it and spending time on development of academic literacy in disciplinary contexts.
 - Provide mentors – both at staff and peer level – to motivate students. This may include featuring later-year or graduate students who can share lessons learned.
 - Model ways of thinking and problem-solving for students, particularly in first year, so that they learn how to think and learn in the university context, and how to balance the different dimensions of their lives and learning.
3. **Monitor and respond to demographic subgroup differences and their impact on engagement**
 - Make it a priority to get to know your students, their needs, aspirations and motivations.
 - Monitor the subgroup differences and develop targeted strategies for engaging students according to their needs and background experiences.
 - This provides a powerful platform for supporting and teaching students in a responsive way so as to maximise the possibilities for engagement.
4. **Ensure expectations are explicit and responsive**
 - Communicate expectations clearly and consistently across the institution and within faculties and departments.
 - Reiterate expectations at appropriate times through the semester and in different settings - before semester begins, and before and during peak stress times in the semester.
 - Include students in the expectation-building exercise. Listen to their expectations. Be responsive where appropriate. Ensure that they know you have listened to their views, but be sure to shape expectations so that the highest standards of learning and teaching are maintained. Do not be driven by unrealistic expectations.
5. **Foster social connections**
 - In small groups: When students have many off-campus commitments, the value of in-class time should be maximised. Opportunities for active and collaborative learning are particularly important. Encourage problem-solving activities, small group discussion of reading and class materials, and provide intellectual stimulation and challenge.
 - In large lectures: Even here, student interaction can be fostered through question-answer sessions and a range of interactive activities which help to break down the potentially alienating barriers created by the large group anonymity syndrome.
 - Online: Provide for online discussion, collaboration and interaction.
 - Create opportunities for civic engagement with communities beyond the campus.
6. **Acknowledge the challenges**
 - Let students know that you/ your department/ unit/ institution understand and are aware of various pressures they face as a student.
 - Acknowledge that a large proportion of students will be juggling work and study commitments throughout the semester. This may be done in reading guides, lectures or tutorials.
 - Be explicit and proactive in dealing with issues and challenges that potentially jeopardise student engagement.
7. **Provide targeted self-management strategies**
 - Seek to develop self-regulated learners who drive their own engagement behaviours.
 - Discuss strategies for time management and maintaining motivation, particularly during stressful times of semester.

- Identify the various sources of help early in the semester and at key moments through semester so that students are prepared ahead of time. They need to know that they are not alone in facing the challenges and they also need to know where to go for help.
8. **Use curricular structures, assessment and feedback to shape the student experience and encourage engagement**
- Provide feedback and continuous assessment tasks early and often.
 - Use assessment in creative ways to bring peers together both in and out of the classroom
 - Engage students in self-assessment and peer assessment so that the focus is increasingly on their responsibility for becoming and remaining engaged in the learning process.
9. **Manage online learning experiences with care**
- Online resources: Placing lecture notes or audio streaming on the web is not a substitute for effective lecturing. Students indicate that even when all lecture notes are on the web, they will attend lectures if the lecture is interesting and presented well. Contact with academics and their peers is crucial.
 - Student involvement: When lecture material is presented online, academics need to develop strategies for encouraging student involvement during lectures. For example, integrate activities into the lecture timeslot.
 - In online learning environments, capitalise on the community-building capacities of online discussion forums to connect students to each other and to the learning community (see Krause, 2006b).
10. **Recognise the complex nature of engagement in your policy and practice**
- Engagement is a binding of students to each other, to meaningful learning activities, and to the institution.
 - Engagement is also a battle for some students which creates conflict and turmoil.
 - Engagement is an appointment for some who see university as one of many engagements in their daily calendar of activities.
 - It should be a promise and a pledge which brings with it reciprocal rights and responsibilities.
 - Engagement should be an interlocking and a 'fastening' of students to learning and university learning communities in an engagement relationship which is mutually beneficial and continues well beyond graduation.
 - The nature of students' engagement changes over time – monitor the changes from one year level to the next in transitions to and through the institution. Be responsive in supporting different forms of engagement throughout their experience.