So yes, Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management, which is housed in the GBS. I’d like to talk today about cohesive teaching teams and student engagement. And the particular innovation that I’m going to present is not an innovation that’s amazingly unique rocket science. It’s something that I’ve picked up from actually attending these kinds of forums over the years. So it’s sort of a practice that you’re probably engaging in to some extent in your own courses already.

The other thing is that it’s not an innovation that’s so much about student engagement, as it’s a protective factor against student disengagement, which I think is equally as important here in our debate about student engagement.

So my particular teaching context is that I teach large cross-campus courses, usually in first year, which means that I have large teaching teams. So the challenge for me is to make sure that I have congruence in my teaching teams. I need my teaching teams to be delivering material consistently, and I need them to be working together cohesively on the various campuses that my teachers are taught across.

A central issue that I have encountered over the years is that if your tutors are confused about a course, it will invariably translate into students being confused. And when students become confused about what’s expected of them in a course, they then tend to be not so satisfied with the course, and then very disengaged with the course. So this is a situation that I learned about through experience, and I was determined to turn that around in a couple of courses that I’m teaching. So what I wanted to do was to make sure that my sessional staff understood all of my expectations of them, that they knew what their weekly teaching requirements were, that material was being delivered consistently, and then obviously that marking also was occurring consistently, which is a huge issue across campuses with large courses. And I also wanted to make sure that my teaching team got on professionally. I wasn’t asking them to be friends, but so long as they actually got on in a professional capacity.

So as I said, an innovation that you probably already used to some extent. I spent a fair bit of time before the start of this semester developing a course bible, and I put everything in there about my course. Probably the most important thing that I put in there was an overall list of the course objectives, and also I gave my tutors weekly teaching objectives, so that they knew exactly what I wanted them to achieve in each of their tutorials. That way, if there was a bit of variance in the way they delivered the material, they all knew that they had to achieve certain objectives. Now the trick was, I also gave that material to students, so students knew what they were supposed to get out of each tutorial as well. So then everything as is listed on the slide was in there, all the material that I needed for
assessment. I told them when I wanted things marked by, so they knew well in advance of when marking was actually due that I needed things done within a three-week turn-round period. I gave them their job descriptions and referred them to the huge array of resources that the university offers for sessional staff as well. I also gave them the opportunity to give me feedback, so as part of their associated hours I requested that they provide feedback on what I had asked them to do in each tutorial, to find out whether I was actually hitting the mark. Because I’m lecturing but not actually tutoring. So they are at the coal face of the delivery of my course, and I want to know whether it’s actually working.

My teaching this semester was all at the Nathan campus even though I am based here on the Gold Coast. So there was a disconnect between myself and my staff and students. So I did only have the opportunity to meet with them four times throughout the semester. But I pre-scheduled those; they were scheduled before the semester started. I found that at the first one when I gave them their tutor bible – as I refer to it – there was a lot to talk about, but the following three, there was a bit of marking moderation occurring, and then it was more like just having a coffee and a catch-up because there literally were no questions, which was fantastic.

So that’s where the impact lies. The sessional staff in their feedback back to me – and this was taught by another lecturer on the Gold Coast campus – they all described the course as well organised and easy to follow. They were confident in the course delivery, and that translated into student engagement. They had good attendance in tutorials. There was a noticeable reduction across the board in student email inquiries or any complaints. I didn’t receive a single complaint this semester so far, which was good, and good attendance. A positive was that the tutors were able to exercise more autonomy. So they really took ownership of the teaching environment in their tutorials, which was great for the course. And there was cohesion within my teaching team, which was a great outcome as well. I’m yet to see how this actually translates into my ACC data, but I’m fairly confident from anecdotal evidence that it’s been a real positive.

End of recording