Speaker

So teaching first year students is an amazingly rewarding area of work; getting a university degree changes people's lives. With a university degree you're more likely to have a socioeconomic standing; more likely to have better health and also your family is more likely to have better health; and also life expectancy is longer for people with a university education. So pretty important stuff and if we can help in some sort of way to help students transition into the university environment let's do it, why not do that it's incredibly powerful work.

Some of the things to be aware of when teaching first year students is their needs, where are they coming from. So things around their sense of capability, their sense of purpose, what is their sense of connection is this where I belong; all that sort of stuff is incredibly important and we can have a powerful role in that.

Something I've discovered from my PhD research is that 46 percent of my sample first year students, 46 percent of them were worried that they don't have what it takes or don't think they're smart enough to be in the university environment. So to put that into context in any given time in your classroom almost half of the people in your room might be riddled with self doubt feeling that they don't belong here and that could be a really private doubt that they harbour. Even though they've arrived they still have that I don't belong here, that feeling deep inside them. And we can play a powerful role in helping to normalise those feelings and also to help those feelings go away.

Something that I like to do with my students is to tell stories so I might tell stories about if it's week one what was I feeling when it was week one when I was a student. If it's assignment writing time what was I going through at around assignment writing time. So I think that as tutors we can be role models and if the students have got four different tutors then they might be getting four different narratives of different ways to approach the university learning experience. Because we need to remember that our students whereas the other university environments might have 10 to 20 percent of their students might be the first in their family to attend university we have more like 70 percent of our students are the first in their family to attend university. And that is often associated with something called low academic capital which is understanding what the university environment is about, what's a lecture, what's a tutorial, what are contact hours, what's my role and responsibility as a student here. So that tends to be a little bit lower in students who are trail blazers, the first in their family to go to university. So helping to manage those expectations and helping to impart that knowledge is something that we can do. So yeah I like to do that through story telling.
A big area where the expectation of the new students and the expectation of the university probably doesn’t align tends to be around time management. I find most of the students I meet in their orientation or week one are not aware that 10 credit points tends to equal about 10 hours of work, they see the two hour lecture and the one hour tute thinking I just have three hours for that subject at university and it's not the case. And it's so important that they get that message from us. I used to do that in my teaching through story telling especially around assignments. I might say how long is that taking you guys and make sure you’ve got enough time set aside for it. And also too providing messages of hope, so explaining it took me three hours to read my first journal article and I still didn’t understand a word of it. But letting them know that that reading and writing is a skill that develops over time and that you do get quicker at it, it just takes hard work and practice.

And the last thing to remember as a tutor is to remember that you are part of a first year team; you have a first year advisor, you have convenors, you have head tutors and you have other tutors in your course. So something I find is really powerful as a first year advisor is when we'll have a tutor come speak to me about a student and go oh do you know anything about this student. And I'm like oh that name rings a bell I'll just check with their other tutor. And then we’re able to put together a really coherent response to help address that student’s needs.

END OF TRANSCRIPT