Hi everyone. Look, I’ve got 17 slides, so I’m going to go so fast you’re all going to have a seizure. Alright?

Now one of the challenges that I came across when Chris Grimmer contacted me about presenting today, was how to design a very difficult title that you could say after you’ve had a glass of red wine. The Synergy of Assertive Student Set of Strategies. You try and say that.

And I started to think about what we have within our school and I’ll talk about our school in a minute. And what [0:00:32] has said. It’s about shared responsibility and it’s also being able to utilise the richness and the expertise of who we have within our school.

So the background is, I am the deputy head of school of the School of [0:00:46] and Physical Sciences. And also the first year advisor for student peer mentoring program coordinator, the student success program advisor and I could go on and on and on. I have, in my school, about 53 staff that are involved in course delivery. We have round about 1000 students, undergraduates at the moment, as well as a large number of postgraduate students. Nine undergraduate bachelor programs that span across Nathan and Gold Coast campus. And our school is really focused on an ethos of excellence in teaching and learning, as well as scientific research.

We have a number of award winners in our school, teaching, learning, award winners as well as grant recipients and I have some of them sitting in the audience today, so I’m very privileged and honoured to work with these people and to utilise their expertise and to be able to glean information on how they’re so successful in what they do. But there are some issues of concern, particularly for this year. For example, our numbers are down. Our lower, we have lower commencing student numbers in most of our programs in 2012, and this is due to external factors.

So if our numbers are down, you also notice we didn’t meet our targets. We didn’t meet our targets in our Commonwealth supported places, but in particularly, we are right down on our overseas students, our international students. Again, these are external factors to us, so what do we do about this?

The other concern is retention. We have a loss of students mid year and moving from first to second year. So we have lower numbers, we haven’t met our targets and also we need to keep these students. So how do we keep these 681 students happy and wanting to stay with us? We looked at the Studying at Griffith survey, but we also looked at, we did our own first year undergraduate survey. In O week. And we asked them, what are your
intentions? We’d like to know, are you staying with us or not? And we had 339 commencing first year students and 154 responded, so that’s a 46% response rate and we found that overall Griffith University was going to lose at least 16 full time students from the end of first year from our programs and that’s just with a 46% response rate.

And out of those 16 students, we’re going to lose nearly $600,000 to Griffith University, if they don’t complete their degree and they’re going to leave us. If, say, it was 32, students, we’re looking at $1.2 million. So we decided, we need to have a plan of action here.

So we looked at six fundamental elements. And we have instigated a number of new elements in to the school. We already do have in place a number of first year strategies and we have a student support site. We have peer mentoring programs, etcetera etcetera. But we needed to add some other things as well.

So the first thing we did was we, like we always do, we form a committee. So we’ve got the student experience committee. And I chair that committee. And this is not just a set of academics sitting around having coffee and cookies. We also have our discipline heads. We also have undergraduate students that represent their programs and their year. And we also have a number of international students and indigenous representatives as well. And we all sit down with an ethos of shared responsibility on how do we improve student engagement and retention within the school?

I won’t go through all this. I do have a number of copies that I’ve, colour photocopies here, that are available. Because there’s a lot of information on this slide that you might want to read later.

We also asked the students, you want to be more engaged, so what do you want us to do? Well, they said we want some social activities. So we organised the student social committee. This is run by the BPS students for the BPS students. One person sits there as an academic representative, but these are, again, postgraduate and undergraduate students. They’re whole of cohort, they’re all of programs. And they were so excited that they would be able to run their own committee. And we’ve given them a budget of $6800 this year to do what they want. They’re already starting to set up the student research symposium with prizes and awards for undergraduates and postgraduates. And they want a student ball and movie nights, etcetera, etcetera. And they’re keen, and they are now going to go out and talk to the other students as well.

So we already do have a top front loaded set of strategies in place. We have first year advisors, the peer mentoring program. We’ve got our own survival guide, with are you ready workshops, first and foremost on-line site. We have a Facebook site, which I’ll talk about a bit later. And we have common time sessions, drop in sessions for the core, threshold first year courses.

As I said, we do have a peer mentoring program and it is working very well. We have second and third year senior students looking after the first year students. We used to
have 20 mentors look after a range of undergraduate students who wanted assistance in their first year. Now we have every first year commencing student has a mentor that they’re assigned to and they’re told within 0 week. And the students that are the mentors are also gaining confidence and leadership skills as well.

We have implemented a student success program. And I’ll be talking to Peter about how we can better modify that. We’re, and the aim of our student success program was to support student engagement in the first year of university and to provide early interventions that lead to improved levels of persistence and thus increase retention rates and enhance performance. And again, we have a number of database surveys and information here. We looked at poor performance in the first item of assessment in a core course. Early non-attendance and non-contact with the Griffith, Learning At Griffith course resources. We put all this information together and we identify at risk students.

We have a coordinator, that is me again, at the moment. And we have a number of senior students who are the student success program advisors. And we are fairly assertive in inviting these students in to the program when we notice that they are not performing well or they’ve disengaged. And these are just some of the activities, again, I’ve got this all written out for you if you want them. Just grab the information. So we have done a Q-TAC analysis, a first year survey, we’ve looked at identifiers and then we have a number of roles for the coordinator and the advisors.

However, we’ve also now started the second year experience. And we’re talking about a student lifecycle here. First year is a transitional year and then second year, and this is where students experience the second year slump phenomenon, so they need extra support and academic advice. And then there’s the third year, career readiness part of the cycle. So we have created a second year experience coordinator within the school and we also have a teaching and learning grant where we’re looking, at the second year slump. We’re characterising the second year slump phenomenon with inside students and exploring activities that can address this slump phenomenon. And we have a second year coordinator in the audience here today. So we’re looking at that part of the life cycle.

Then we have the third year experience. This is the career readiness, graduate success activities. We have again created a role of third year experience coordinator, who works with the third year core course lecturers and teaching staff. We’ll be sending the coordinator off to Melbourne to look at enhancing graduate readiness. And we have also got the third year core course convenor team who review the third year curricula of programs and assessment schedules. This also needs to be done with first and second year as well.

And we have just set up an on-line third year organisational resource site for our third year students. But also our second and first year students can look at this site as well. So we asked the students, what do they want in third year? We’ve surveyed them. We think, oh they need this. But we want to know what they want. So we’ve got a number of set activities in place.
And finally, we do have the student Facebook site. This started about four or five years ago, I started it up, we had about 20 students start with me. I was the administrator and now we have 820 members. We have undergraduates, current and past, who have left as well but are still in contact. We have postgraduates, we have alumni, we have employers, we have staff and they’re all talking to one another on Facebook. And it runs itself now. The students run it. I don’t even have to administer it anymore.

There were some rules, no swearing, no dirty pictures, all that sort of stuff, no porn, you know, all that. And they run it themselves, it’s amazing. So my final slide. We need students to feel that they can expect to succeed. We have to provide clear and consistent information about what we require of them. We have to provide effective advice about choice of programs and study and give them some idea of their future goals.

We have to provide them with some social and personal support in addition to the academic support. They have to feel like they’re part of a community, part of a school, they belong with us. And we have to have them as valued members of our community, our institutional community. They’re going to be our ambassadors. They’re going to be Griffith University ambassadors. So we need to foster this. And we need to foster a general interest in learning.

So we’ve put in all these places in the school. The whole of school approach. And there are some very good results coming through that we will collate and present in the years to come and the months to come. And we’re hoping that these strategies support these contexts and we will have an improvement in retention as well as we’ll see improvement in student engagement with all of our programs. So thank you.

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