GRiffth University

Good Practice Guidelines for the First Year Advisor Role

March 2010

Purpose

The First Year Advisor role is fundamental to the success of Griffith University’s student engagement and retention goals, and is valued by the University. The FYA role provides expertise and leadership to enable school and degree programs to plan, implement and deliver orientation and engagement strategies relevant to the needs and characteristics of their commencing students.

This document has three purposes:

i. to affirm the importance of the FYA role in enhancing the quality of the first year experience at School/Program level;

ii. to outline guidelines for good practice in enhancing the first year experience (FYE) at School/Program level for Griffith University; and

iii. to clarify accountability for the conduct of First Year Orientation and Engagement activities at the School or Program level. The First Year Advisor has overall responsibility for the First Year Orientation and Engagement plan, activities and the outcomes for their School or degree Program, and is accountable to their Head of School. However, this does not mean that FYAs will conduct all of the first year activities.

First Year Orientation and Engagement activities will generally be implemented collaboratively by a team of staff in each School/Program comprising the First Year Advisor, School/Program Administration Officer, Program Convenors and First Year Course Convenors. The FYA is responsible for convening the First Year Team and ensuring that agreed activities are planned, conducted and evaluated.

It should be noted that while this document is intended to be comprehensive, the activities listed should not be considered either exhaustive or prescriptive.

The following activities align with the areas of responsibility described in Policy 2.9.29 Role of the First Year Advisor. [hyperlink to come]

1. Planning for the Following Year

- Initiate and develop, in consultation with the Program Convenor and First Year Convenors, an annual First Year Plan for first year orientation and engagement activities for both semesters. Plans should be based on the University first year model of the Five Senses of Success [hyperlink to come] and developed using the University’s First Year Planning Process, so that a consistent framework is applied across the University.

  Plans should be reviewed towards the end of each year, and modified for implementation for the following year (e.g., draft plan by September 30th, and final plan by October 31st). Heads of Schools and Deans/Deputy Deans Learning and Teaching would be expected to provide feedback on, and endorsement of all First Year Plans. Download a template for the First Year Planning Process and an exemplar of a First Year Plan. [hyperlink to come]

- Collaborate with Disability Services, Gumurrrii Student Support Unit and International Office to plan the sensitive and effective orientation of commencing students with specific needs.

- Collaborate with First Year Course Convenors and the School Administration Officer to organise a coherent first year student timetable for the First Year Program, and to negotiate this with Student Timetabling.

- Collaborate with First Year Course Convenors to coordinate the timing of due dates for the assessment of all first year courses.

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1 The terms 'School' and 'Program' are used interchangeably in this document in recognition of the variety of configurations across Groups.
2. Organising Academic Orientation

- Initiate, organise and conduct a minimum half-day, school-specific, Orientation Program in Orientation Week, in consultation and collaboration with academic and general staff. The FYA should liaise with the university-wide orientation team in designing the discipline or program-specific orientation program. See exemplars of Orientation Program plans on the GIHE first year website. [hyperlink to come]

- Arrange a similar orientation program in the week prior to the commencement of studies where there is a student intake into first year in Semester 2.

- Initiate, organise and conduct a weekly one hour Common Time Program for at least the first 6 weeks of first semester to: orient commencing students to the University, the campus, and the school; provide a series of “just-in-time” information sessions (e.g., for accessing resources, understanding the requirements of first assessment items etc.); and to surface and problem solve early issues in the cohort. It is expected that the FYA will evaluate the effectiveness of the program on a yearly basis. Download an exemplar of a Common Time Program. [hyperlink to come]

3. Facilitating Student Networks

- Initiate, conduct and actively manage a Peer Mentoring Program for at least the first half of the first semester. Implementation support is available for FYAs, with Central Student Services offering to train peer mentors and to match peer mentors and mentees. The role of FYAs includes: to recruit peer mentors; to actively manage the program by conducting regular reviews with mentors and mentees; to assist peer mentors to actively problem solve difficult issues with their mentees; to monitor potentially at-risk students identified by mentors; and to evaluate the effectiveness of the program each year with both mentors and mentees.

   Training and management of peer mentoring programs will need to take account of student diversity, including students with a disability and students from culturally diverse backgrounds, by catering for students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, International students, and students with English as a second language. The training of peer mentors is centrally conducted (on request) by Student Services for Schools, Faculties and Groups at the beginning of each academic year. Resources and support to assist you in establishing mentoring programs is provided by mentoring@griffith. See https://app.secure.griffith.edu.au/03/mgmentoring/main.php

4. Monitoring Academic Achievement and Progress – Early Detection and Early Intervention

- Ensure that monitoring systems are put in place for the first two weeks of tutorials in the first semester of enrolment to identify students at risk of early drop out or early academic failure. These data should be used to intervened by phone with students identified as non-attendees in all School courses to assess their intentions regarding engagement. Those who self-identify as not intending to proceed with their enrolment should be given information regarding the process for cancellation prior to the HECS census date at the end of Week 4 of first semester.

- Identify, monitor and intervene with “at-risk” students who have either failed, or received a marginal pass based on results from the first assessment item in the first semester of first year. This outcome can be achieved using a variety of processes, which should be systematic and structured. The University is trialling approaches to its Amber Risk Assessment [hyperlink to come] and the FYA will need to be familiar with initiatives and the University’s requirements in this area.

- Collate, analyse and document the assessment results all first year courses hosted by the School/degree/program in both semesters. The analysis should compare the non-submission and failure rates for all individual assessment items, as well as for each course as a whole, to those from the previous year. This data should be disseminated to key School staff involved in the first year experience, to inform revision of assessment content and practices.

5. Evaluating First Year Activities at the School/Program Level

- Share responsibility with the Head of School/Program and relevant staff teams for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of all required minimum interventions/activities, with the dual aims of reporting on the effectiveness of the first year experience, and improving school strategies for the following year.
✓ Write a yearly report to their Head of School and Dean/Deputy Dean Learning and Teaching on the effectiveness of their First Year Orientation and Engagement Program, with Heads of School and Deans/Deputy Deans Learning and Teaching expected to provide feedback on reports. Download a sample annual report. [hyperlink to come]

✓ Provide a summary of feedback to First Year Staff, Program Convenor and Head of School on School findings from the Starting at Griffith Surveys: Students’ Perceptions of Orientation, and Students’ Perceptions of the Early Learning Environment, with the aim of identifying areas of strength as well as improvement for the next First Year School Plan.

✓ Meet with the appropriate academic managers (e.g., Head of School, Program Convenors) at the beginning of each semester to review strategies, resources and plans.

6. Contributing to Knowledge about the Commencing Student Experience at Griffith

✓ Participate in Griffith Forums on the first year experience conducted at group/faculty and University levels.

✓ Adopt a scholarly approach to the role with the aim of producing peer reviewed papers for conferences and journals. This involves engaging with the literature, reflection on practice, and gathering evidence through the systematic evaluation of both institutional data (e.g., Starting at Griffith surveys on Orientation and the Early Learning Environment, retention rates) and local data (e.g., student performance on assessment, surveys or focus group/interview of students or staff).

✓ Collaborate through peer support and mentoring to enhance practice and scholarship. Join or establish an FYA Community of Practice with the goals of practice improvement and the development of scholarship in the first year experience.

7. Student Advising, Consultation and Communication

✓ Be available on a weekly basis for a significant amount of time for student consultation (viz. a minimum of 2 hours scheduled for face-to-face consultation time each week, with emails from first year students to be responded to within 48 hours). Face-to-face consultation hours will need to be scheduled around the first year lecture timetable, to ensure maximum student availability and access. This time allocation may need to be greater for programs with large enrolments.

✓ Establish, in collaboration with the appropriate academic manager (e.g., Head of School, Program Convenor) a clear and consistent student consultation/office hour policy for academic staff teaching into the first year program.

8. Seeking Support and Resources to Facilitate the Role

✓ In large programs or disciplines the FYA role may require administrative support and additional resources. These should be negotiated in advance with the Head of School.

9. Workload Allocation for the FYA Role

✓ Activities associated with the FYA role will be taken into account in workload allocations in line with Policy 6.10.45 Workload allocation guidelines. [hyperlink to come]

10. Recognising and Rewarding First Year Advisors

✓ Griffith recognises the value and importance of the FYA role to the success of the first year experience across the University. A key reward mechanism is a system of institutional and national learning and teaching awards and grants. These awards and grants are recognised in the staff promotion process as evidence of achievement and excellence. Applications from FYA staff are encouraged. See http://www.griffith.edu.au/learning-teaching/awards-grants/griffith-awards-grants-program