



Key Findings for University Staff

First in Family: University Professional Staff

FOCUSSING ON FIF CAN HAVE BROAD RANGING IMPACTS

Competing work and life demands can make studying at university hard for FiF students. However, FiF students also demonstrate that they are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed.

Early engagement with the academic environment and developing a sense of identity as a student contributes to their success.

The FiF students in this study identified that accessing support from university transition and counselling staff and seeking help from financial services was really important. They may take longer to develop their academic skills and confidence, but once their first year at university has been successfully navigated, they match their non-FiF peers.

FiF students identified that university was about more than obtaining a degree as it helped them build other skills and improved their confidence.

Focusing on FiF students has broader impacts as FiF students may influence other family members to follow them into higher education.

"I think it's good because I have a couple of cousins that will now be going onto uni too and hopefully my sister. I guess I've been able to help them with the experience as well."

What does this mean for you?

Focus on the first year: By assisting FiF students to get past the initial 'culture shock' and settle into university life, you will help them move forward and succeed as students.

Communicate: Tailor university communications with prospective FiF students, families and the general public to focus on the economic and other benefits of higher education such as increased awareness and understanding of society.

Identify and target: Introduce methods of identifying FiF students early on so that targeted support, information and resources can be provided to promote retention of FiF students.

Educate: Provide information on FiF students (mature age and school leaver) to first year educators so they can also adapt their approach where possible.

BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FiF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is expected of them.
- Research suggests that universities do not necessarily compensate for a FiF student's lack of information on university life, leaving them to navigate educational pathways on their own.
- Many FiF students come from either a low socio-economic or regional or remote backgrounds, are mature-aged and/or are Indigenous.
- FiF students are more likely to be studying nursing, education, management and commerce, or society and culture than law, medicine and engineering.

Inform: Consider whether more comprehensive information needs to be provided to potential students, families and the public on the overall return on investment that participation in higher education provides.

“Having a degree has benefitted me definitely. And I think having the degree, I hope would benefit others in my future work and life ... So I’ve got a big focus on the greater good I think. And I hope I can, I guess, contribute to that. At least that’s my lifetime goal.”

YOU CAN INFLUENCE THEIR CHOICES

Parents / primary carers are less likely to be the main influence on a FiF student’s views, whether school leaver or mature age, on what to expect from university. School leavers are more likely to seek information from another source on what is to be expected from university, such as their school teachers or school careers counsellor.

FiF students are also more likely to be influenced by university websites and recruiting information in forming their views on what to expect from university.

What does this mean for you?

Focus on the school system: It makes sense to focus recruitment efforts for school leaver FiF students on teachers and counsellors within the school system.

Resources and information: adapted to FiF students when promoting the University in schools and expos aimed at recruiting new students.

Marketing: Adapt existing marketing efforts, such as websites, TV, and brochures to meet information needs of FiF students.

Clear Language: Provide easy navigation on websites and use clear, straight forward language on all print material.

UNIVERSITY WEBSITES AND RECRUITING STRATEGIES ARE KEY

A key source of information for FiF students are university websites. Commencing FiF students, especially school leavers, agreed that university websites helped to shape their views on what to expect from university. And, a greater proportion agreed that the information they got from university websites accurately reflected what the University life would be like.

FiF students, especially school leavers, are more likely to access university recruiting information (eg. open days, adverts) in developing their views on what to expect from university. And, a greater proportion of both school leaver and mature age FiF students agreed that the information obtained accurately reflected what university life would be like.

What does this mean for you?

Website: Keep your University’s website up-to-date, use images that realistically reflect the diversity of students backgrounds.

Recruitment strategies: Focus on the information needs of FiF students in all public recruitment strategies to help recruit and retain FiF students.

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Many FiF students reported that attending university had resulted in significant personal costs, such as poorer health and eating habits. This was linked to their challenges of balancing the competing demands of study, paid work and family. When asked what would have made them more prepared for university, one student responded:

“I think that I would have benefited from workshops on note taking in lectures and more specific course information and study advice sessions prior to commencing the year. For example - the benefits of tutorials, pre-reading, other study tips to help get us started on the right foot. I felt as though I started out being behind.”

What does this mean for you?

Encourage skills development: Work with all teaching staff to embed time management and study skill development into the first year of curriculum so that it benefits all students.

Promote study/life balance: University support programs addressing student health behaviours and managing multiple life demands may improve the FiF student experience and help to alleviate some associated personal costs of university life.

Targeted support programs: FiF students would benefit from programs assisting them to make the transition to student life.

“Even though the open days and information sessions were incredibly useful to prepare for university, there wasn’t enough of these sessions to give a proper introduction to university life.”

