

Literature Review. There is limited research which specifically links to pre-admission study support for undergraduates. Thomas (2011) acknowledges that pre-entry interventions has generally been ignored by research to date. Three themes emerged from existing evidence: 1) induction 2) academic and social integration in first year transition 3) retention and student engagement. Others have identified an academic culture shock of those who make that transition to higher education (HE). If the transition isn't smooth, then this can impact upon retention. Whilst work completed by Carolan and Kruger (2011) indicate a need for greater opportunities for students to prepare; for more time to study; greater student support, alongside students identifying that financial and childcare remain areas of concern. Less recent research (Bers and Smith, 1991) established that non-academic factors can have more weight in withdrawal decisions. Friendships and peer support can make that difference when difficulties are encountered (Thomas 2011) especially if longer and thinner induction periods are timetabled. Providing these effective opportunities for students to assimilate knowledge and socialise with peers and staff helps engage them into their new academic role as HE students. Widening participation research (Bamber and Tett, 2001) points to the value of integrated models, particularly for academic and 1:1 support, with additional support available when required.

Methodology. All 46 occupational therapy pre-registration undergraduate students of the September 2012 intake were invited to attend one of two days of pre-induction support sessions. These days consisted of details about the course, academic writing support, opportunity to meet others on the course and initial screening for dyslexia. Nineteen students took up the offer. The whole cohort were then surveyed at three different points during their first year to ascertain the uptake and type of support students who both attended the pre-induction and those that did not accessed during their first year at university. An action research process was adopted to record how the project could make a difference by supporting students at an early stage. As the process and evaluation of modules is part of standard practice, no formal ethical approval was required. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) clarify that the processes we engage in have implications for rethinking educational enquiry.

Key Themes

- ◆ **Preparation**—The pre-induction attendees viewed this as a normal part of the orientation day as well as the pre-induction day.
- ◆ **Information**—The pre-induction attendees valued having information about the course in advance.
- ◆ **Support**—The pre-induction attendees valued the opportunity to meet staff and peers in advance of starting the course.
- ◆ **Personal**—All students felt they had accessed personal support from friends and family.
- ◆ **Orientation**—The pre-induction attendees felt they had gained by orientating themselves within the campus.
- ◆ **Resources**—The pre-induction attendees felt they were more confident about using the university resources and VLE platform.

Surprises

- ◆ The pre-induction attendees reported feeling less confident with academic writing skills. Does this mean that they self selected to attend the pre-induction day because of their lack of confidence, as opposed to any lack of knowledge?
- ◆ Throughout the evaluation of the pre-induction days students, state they valued the people they have met or come into contact with, as opposed to valuing just the material resources.
- ◆ All students have embraced the need for extra study support sessions and have initiated these independently of tutor support.
- ◆ Some students in the cohort remain passive about being given information rather than proactively looking for it, which was disappointing.

Implications

- ◆ Recognition that pre-induction opportunities are valuable for supporting students during their first year.
- ◆ Students value meeting people both staff and peers sooner, rather than later.
- ◆ Occupational therapy wishes to continue with the relationship built between student study support staff and themselves.
- ◆ For the pre-induction day content and principles to be absorbed into the induction week and professional development module at the beginning of term one to enhance student engagement and participation for all.
- ◆ For study support tutors to be seen as an additional support to teaching, and not as remedial sessions.
- ◆ An article is currently being written for publication within a peer reviewed journal.
- ◆ Further research is needed in this area.

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