



UniSA

Free Textbooks for Students from Equity Groups: Preliminary Data from an Initiative at the University of South Australia

Tristana Sidoryn (Coordinator: Student Transition)

University of South Australia, Division of Business

- University context
- Overview of the Free Textbooks Initiative
- Results – retention, success and satisfaction rates
- Discussion - How other institutions have implemented projects to support students from equity groups

Context

- 33,000 students
- 10,500 in Business School
- Culturally diverse domestic student population and 28% international students
- Mission statement - Focus on “achieving equitable educational access and outcomes across our diverse student community”

- The financial costs associated with higher education can be a major deterrent to students successfully completing their studies
- Australasian Survey of Student Engagement - 26% of first year students who left university without a degree indicated that their departure was due to financial reasons or to reduce study costs
- US National Survey of Student Engagement – similar results regarding students dropping out of university due to financial reasons

Overview – Free Textbooks Initiative

- In 2010 there were 8 new core business subjects
- There were concerns that students from equity groups would have difficulty purchasing the textbooks (approximately \$500 per semester)
- With the new subjects came new textbooks - limited second-hand textbooks
- The Free Textbooks Initiative was proposed to assist students from particular equity groups:
 - Indigenous
 - Rural
 - Low-socioeconomic status (Low-SES)

Administering the Free Textbooks Initiative

- The textbooks were purchased – 200 copies of the textbooks for each of the eight subjects - \$138,238
- Students were notified if they were eligible to receive the free textbooks
- They could either collect the textbooks (mainly during Orientation) or have them mailed if they were studying online
- In Semester 2 2010 there were 176 students eligible to receive the free textbooks

Administering the Free Textbooks Initiative

Table 1: The number of students eligible for the initiative in Semester 2 2010

Equity Group of Students	Total Eligible & Active		Student Numbers Who Collected Textbooks			
	Com	Cont	Com	(%)	Cont	(%)
Rural	136	0	107	78.68%	0	0
Indigenous	14	16	8	57.14%	9	56.25%
Low-SES	4	6	4	100%	3	50%
Total	154	22	119	77.27%	12	54.55%

Please note that not all the students were enrolled in the core business subjects and thus although they were eligible they did not access the Free Textbooks Initiative.

* Com (Commencing/New students) and Cont (Continuing/Senior level students)

Table 2: University offers translating to acceptances

	SP2 2009	SP2 2010
Rural/Isolated Offers	258	261
Rural/Isolated Acceptances	129 (50%)	158 (60.53%)

- There was an increase of rural student acceptances of 10.53%
- Please note that some Indigenous and Low-SES students have an alternate entry and do not apply via the usual pathway

Table 3: Retention Rates 2009 and 2010

Equity Group	2009		2010	
Overall	79.72%		74.21%	
Rural/Isolated	72.44%		81.25%	
Indigenous	Com	Cont	Com	Cont
	71.43%	72.22%	87.50%	100%
Low-SES	Com	Cont	Com	Cont
	33.33%	81.81%	66.66%	81.81%

Table 4: Success Rates 2009 and 2010

Equity Group	2009		2010	
Overall	79.21%		78.33%	
Rural/Isolated	79.08%		84.92%	
Indigenous	Com	Cont	Com	Cont
	62.5%	80%	88.88%	66.66%
Low-SES	Com	Cont	Com	Cont
	0%	70%	66.66%	62.5%

Key findings

- 19% of students indicated that the free textbooks initiative influenced their decision to accept an offer at UniSA.
- 42% highlighted that without the free textbook scheme they would not have purchased all the core textbooks.
- 10% of students indicated that without the free textbook scheme they may have considered dropping out of university.
- 69% of students outlined that access to the free textbooks enabled them to obtain better grades.
- 90% of students were satisfied with the free textbooks initiative.

Satisfaction – Survey Results

- *“I’m a single mother and having to purchase all of my textbooks would have caused me quite a lot of financial stress as I did not realise how expensive they were. The free textbook initiative helped me enormously and made my university experience more enjoyable.”*
- *“The Free Textbooks initiative was excellent. It would be great to see more initiatives like this.”*

Satisfaction – Survey Results

- *“If it wasn't for the initiative, I would not have been able to afford textbooks.”*
- *“I think it's a great idea, a lot of people at uni don't purchase the books and I can't imagine I would do very well if I didn't because I used my a lot! They are generally very expensive and a lot of people can't afford them, I think more initiatives like this should be in place.”*

Where to from here?

- Looking at further approaches – such as iPads with the textbooks downloaded
- Further investigation – focus groups, looking at suggestions from students from equity groups on strategies to support them

- How have other institutions implemented projects to support students from equity groups?

1 + 1 + 2 + ...

This is a retention initiative and is used in conjunction with multiple retention strategies (Orientation program, student mentoring, academic mentoring)

- The importance of implementing multiple strategies

Thank you for your participation in this session.